A SCOTTISH FLY-FISHER

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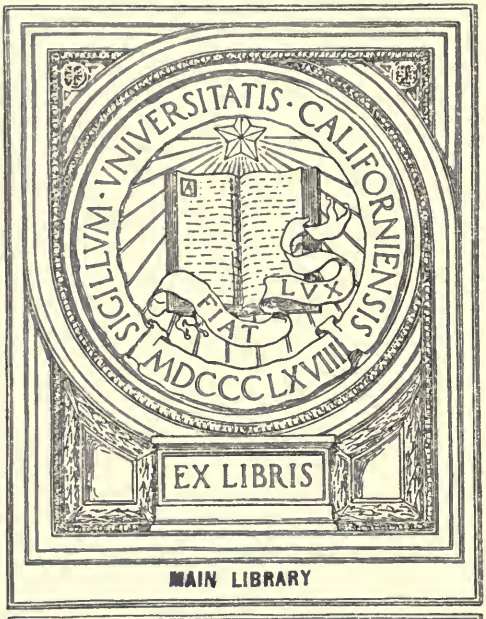

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A SCOTTISH FLY-FISHER

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BY

A. LEITCH

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE AUTHOR

PAISLEY: ALEXANDER GARDNER
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PREFACE

ALTHOUGH its production was undertaken at the instigation of a friend, the writer himself assumes the entire responsibility for a book he feels to be without excuse—save the irrepressible loquacity of the angler whose eagerness to share with others all he knows and much of which he knows nothing, is within the experience of everyone who owns his friendship. The book contains little that is new. It supplies no felt want. Though the reader may find in it an occasional hint not altogether valueless, its purpose is not instructive; it merely records the impressions of a casual angler whose methods are neither artful—in any sense of the term—nor scientific, and who angles as Sarah Battle's young acquaintance took a hand at whist—with the object of unbending his mind. The writer makes no claim to the possession of originality; he is not a person of many inventions; his ingenuity is unequal to the feats some other fishermen perform. In difficulties he is without resource. If the trout are simple enough to accept the flies he offers them they may, haply, find

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their way into his creel; if they look at his lure askance and refuse to entertain it, he leaves them for a less sophisticated prey.

Of the objects supposed to be reproduced in the so-called artificial fly, he is almost entirely ignorant. Not, however, that he prides himself upon the fact or is foolishly contemptuous of the science of insect life; on the contrary, he is firmly persuaded that the more extensive the angler's knowledge of things connected, even remotely, with his art, the greater the delight he discovers in its practice, but, with the example of Stewart and others before him, he is unconvinced that familiarity with the natural history of the fly is essential to the capture of the fish. He is not impressed by the parade, sometimes entirely spectacular, of entomological learning which has become so prominent a feature of the literature of the rod.

There will be found in the book no list of artificial flies. The art of simulating nature in the dressing of the lure is one of which the writer has no skill, and from the perplexing diversity of perfect imitations—of the same original—devised by pundits of our art, he finds it impossible to make a choice. But the omission places the reader at no great disadvantage. What information he desires is abundantly supplied in

other works on angling, and its acquisition involves no arduous research. When in quest of a particular fly, he may select the first encountered, satisfied that, however widely it may differ from others similarly named, its resemblance to the object it is meant to simulate is as accurate as need be.

To the standards of the angler the trout display an inexplicable apathy.

Mr. E. M. Todd informs us that he had been for years in the habit of fishing with a Red Spinner dressed with mallard wings; with, that is, a variety of wing prescribed by Ronalds but not, apparently, in general favour with—the angler. He had been without suspicion of his error, and, as he was perfectly satisfied with the practical success of the lure, might have been living in ignorance of it still, had it not been discovered for him by a friend. The trout, lacking an adviser, failed to discover it at all.

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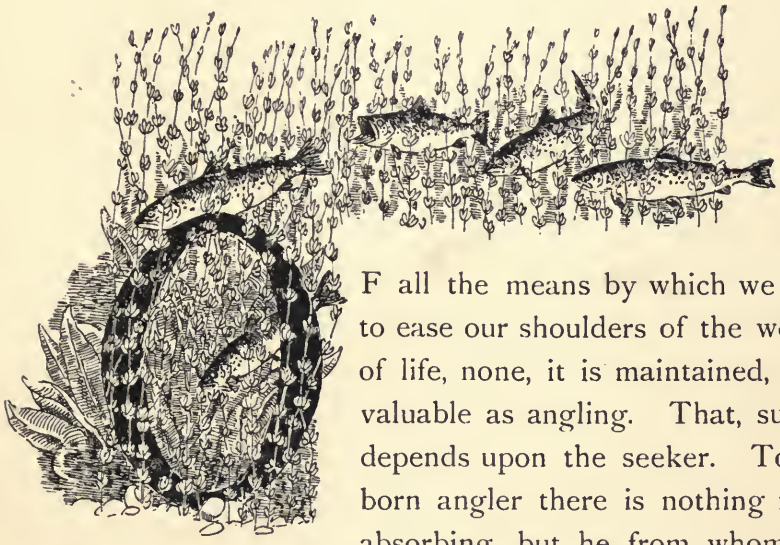
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY



F all the means by which we seek to ease our shoulders of the weight of life, none, it is maintained, is so valuable as angling. That, surely, depends upon the seeker. To the born angler there is nothing more absorbing, but he from whom the angling instinct has been withheld finds in it only another form of tedium. He may be mildly interested while sport is good, but he is without enthusiasm, and in the absence of rising fish is unsustained by hope.

Comparison of angling with other sports is futile. We are not all similarly endowed. We begin life with a diversity of gifts. This man is born with a faculty for mathematics, that with a genius for music, a third with a talent for painting. We are anglers, golfers, cricketers, footballers, as nature determines, and those whose innate bent is towards one variety of sport seem to have but little understanding for the others. Least of all, perhaps, is the angler understood by those who do not share his feeling. To sing the joys of angling to one who lacks the angling sense is vain as talk of music to the deaf or of colour to the blind. Only to those in sympathy with him do the angler's rhapsodies appeal; to others they are foolishness.

No one is so frequently the object of cheap sarcasm as he. He is the perennial butt of the small wit, who

in the things—the many things—beyond his poor capacity sees but provocatives to cackling laughter. The worm with which, in the popular imagination, the angler endeavours to entice the wary trout, is surely the worm that never dies. Our friends are tireless in their efforts to preserve the memory of Johnson's peevish definition of our art. But though we be, by temperament, unable to

appreciate the recreations in which our fellows find relief from toil, we need not scoff. To deride a pastime merely because it is one for which we have no predilection, is to betray a defective intelligence. Our particular diversion is not necessarily the only one that merits the devotion of a reasonable man.

Yet the angler is convinced that, as a refuge from the cares of earth, no pastime equals his, and in his desire to convince others he appeals to the witness of his own feelings. But, though shouted with all the stormy vehemence of that wordy advocate of silence, the grim old Seer of Chelsea, convictions are valueless if unsupported by objective evidence. Inward assurance of the reality of an object of belief may suffice the believer, but it is a flimsy reason on which to demand the acceptance of the belief by those who have no part in it. The angler, however, is not reduced to the testimony of his emotions; he will find abundant evidence of the justice of his claim in a comparison of the literature of angling with that of kindred sports. The latter he will search in vain for any trace of the rapturous delight with which the former overflows.

Unhappily, the angler's schemes, like those of other men, "gang aft agley." His occupation does not always yield him the delight of which he dreams, and

not infrequently the only pleasure he enjoys is that of hope. The beatitude ascribed by Kingsley to the Devil is characterised by all the subtlety a knowledge of its origin would lead us to expect. The thoughtful angler restrains his fancy. He knows that the dizzier the height to which it bears him the longer and more hazardous the fall he risks; that the greater his expectations the more painful his chagrin should misfortune overtake him. In the holiday of the occasional angler who has not learned to take fate's buffetings upstanding, angling should be but an incident. To make it the single interest of his vacation is to court an almost certain disappointment; whatever the result, it is unlikely to prove satisfying; the failure of his enterprise leaves him disconsolately mourning the ruin of his hopes, while its success seldom equals that anticipated.

When, filling a subordinate place in his design, the quest of the elusive trout is of relatively small importance to the angler's happiness, he not only contemplates an empty creel in undisturbed tranquillity but finds occasion for unwonted jubilation in

a full one; he accepts ill fortune with resignation, and rejoices in good, as in an unconjectured grace. A pleasure in prospect is a pleasure already partially discounted; our liveliest pleasures are those that come upon us unawares. The source of my delight in the most memorable fishing I have ever had was not in the quality of the sport, for I have met with better, but in its unexpectedness. Detained, by unhappy circumstance, within the precincts of a dull, uninteresting German Dorf, where life threatened to become as dreary as that of Mariana in her moated grange, I was, to my surprise, given abundant occupation for the rod I had taken with me on the quite unlikely chance of finding an opportunity of using it. Angling had been no part of my plan: it was a remote contingency on which I had bestowed but little thought, and the unlooked for privilege of casting an angle in the trout and grayling haunted stream meandering through the cowslip-spangled meadow just without the village gates, afforded me a joy that was not to be expressed in terms of weight or number.

There are those who assure us that in the contem-

plation of nature they find ample solace for every disappointment. The writer is not among them. Theirs is not the spirit in which he practises his art. To him, angling is no light pastime to be followed with divided mind and easy unconcern of the result ; it is a passion to which he is in thrall ; it engages all his energies and leaves him without interest in anything beside. He, when he goes a-fishing, is dominated by a purpose from which the fairest scene is powerless to divert him. Not even when trout are dour and provokingly indifferent to the fascination of the fly does his attention wander for a moment from his quest. The basket is his sole concern, and on its weight alone depends his pleasure in the day. Should fortune smile on him, his happiness is perfect ; should she frown, he discovers little comfort in the beauty that surrounds him. It is a wan, grey world that lies about him when he comes empty away from the water.

Yet he is not entirely insensitive to nature's charm. Although while actively engaged in fishing he is but dimly aware of his surroundings, he does not wholly escape their magic influence. He feels that much of the delight his recreation yields him is derived from the conditions under which it is pursued ; he is conscious of the excitation of emotions to which it makes

no appeal. But the gratification of his pleasure in the beautiful he defers until the trout has ceased from rising and he from entertaining hope. When the day is done and he rejoices in a well-filled creel, nature rarely calls to him in vain. Not altogether in the weight dependent from his shoulder lies the secret of the exaltation which sustains him on his homeward way and makes of no account the miles which stretch across the wide brown moorland.

Long may it be, Kingsley to the contrary notwithstanding, before nature is entirely under man's dominion. "Arable land is admirable, but I like to see the brackens," as Captain Cutlass said. Agriculture is an ancient and honourable calling, and there are still a few waste places of the earth awaiting the attention of the husbandman. But nature has in her possession many nooks and corners not to be exploited for gain, and God forbid that man should ever lay his touch on one of these to "dress it and keep it." Nature's attraction is in her very wildness, in her unconventionality, and there are few spectacles more depressing than that she presents as she emerges from the hands of the artist. Should she ever be brought completely under subjection, sport will be deprived of its essential element —the pursuit of the wild animal in its natural environ-

ment. The prospect, however, need give us no concern, for long before her subjugation is accomplished we shall probably have lost the instincts of the chase. While these remain to us, the sportsman's most ardent desire will be to get away from the haunts of his fellows, to penetrate the wilderness, to be alone in the "forest primeval." The more remote from human intrusion, the wilder and more primitive his surroundings, the greater his delight. There is no joy to the angler in plying his lure in an aquarium, nor to the big-game hunter in pursuing a semi-domesticated prey through the simple intricacies of an artificial jungle.

That is why sport on Loch Leven is comparatively tame and uninteresting. It is tainted with commercialism. It is sport reduced to business. It suggests the game of Aunt Sally at a country fair. You shy sticks, three shies a penny, at a grotesque figure set up in a corner, and accurate markmanship is rewarded with a cocoa-nut. You get, as the showman says, "Fun for your money, and the nuts for nawthin'." The angler on

Loch Leven pays, at much the same rate, for the privilege of shying at the trout, and with luck and a little skill, he, too, has his reward—and a very handsome reward it sometimes is. He casts his fly—in competitions—into the glaucous-green water, and tries to persuade himself that he is occupied in sport. Somewhere behind his consciousness, however, there lurks an uneasy feeling that his occupation is not genuine sport; that it lacks the condition which gives to genuine sport its zest. The burn-fisher on a far hillside, though his prize be insignificant in comparison, has more real pleasure in his pursuit. The quarry he seeks is in a state of nature; it owes nothing to human care—except, perhaps, the care of the keeper who guards its safety but refrains from interfering in its domestic affairs; it is not brought into being and watchfully nursed through the perils of infancy to make an angler's holiday.

It has been for years my privilege to fish a tiny reservoir into which trout were at one time introduced. No stream enters it and, in consequence, nature is unable to maintain the stock. Though the fish it contains are lusty and strong, and fight with a vigour I have never seen surpassed, their capture yields but little satisfaction; they are living under artificial con-

ditions, and the angler knows it. The water holds no surprises. It conceals no mystery. The number of fish is known; they can be counted. Since so many have been put in, it suffices to subtract the number taken out to arrive at that which remains—making, of course, some allowance for a few the manner of whose dissolution has not been revealed to us. The trout are intimates, and in fraudulently compassing their end, the angler has the unpleasant feeling that, in the beautiful language of God's Own Country, he is playing it low down on them. He is taking a mean advantage of their confidence.

In one of her charming letters to her daughter Madame de Grignan, Madame de Sevigné writes: "Vous passez par dessus la possession de ce qu'on désire pour y voir la séparation;" and, she continues, "Quand on a ce qu'on désire, on est plus près de le perdre." Madame de Grignan was "si philosophe." On "ce qu'on désire," she bestowed a thoughtfully measured affection. That she might be spared the pain inseparable from their loss, she was careful to avoid too deep an interest in the things of time. Unhappily, we are not all possessed of her philosophy, or, as it was called by those who saw her through eyes other than a mother's, her frigid temperament. Our

hearts are not so admirably disciplined. The knowledge that the present will soon be taken from us and its contents become "portions and parcels" of the past, fills us with perturbing thoughts, and it is not in resignation, but dismay, that we contemplate the parting with an object of our love. The angler whose opportunities are few, sometimes looks forward to his unaccustomed holiday with strangely mixed emotions. He counts, impatiently, the days that separate him from it, yet sees their passing with regret. While longingly awaiting its approach he would fain keep it in prospect. He looks beyond it, and sees in its beginning the beginning of the end. With its advent he becomes still more uncomfortably conscious of the flight of time, and since he is unable to prolong his pleasure seeks to heighten its intensity. But he is unfortunate in his methods. Patience abandons him. He pursues his sport with a feverish energy which robs him entirely of the tranquillity of mind essential to its enjoyment. In his restless eagerness to improve the fleeting hour, he is intolerant of interruption and his temper snaps at a touch. He chafes and frets at every slight mischance, while grave disaster excites him to a very hurricane of wrath. He strives to wrest by force what is conferred only by favour, and the more fiercely he struggles for

its possession the more firmly it is withheld from him. Pleasure is not to be compelled; it flees direct pursuit.

As a provision against unhappiness in age, angling rivals whist. The superannuated angler, it is true, will not find in it as in that misnamed "refuge for the intellectually destitute," active employment for the remnant of his mind, but it provides him with a fund of pleasant recollections which help to brighten his declining days. Though, enfeebled by years, he can no longer wield the rod, he may wander in thought by the still loved stream, and enjoy again in all their first intensity the pleasures of the past. Emotions of pain, it has been mercifully ordained, are in their nature evanescent. We remember that we suffered; the suffering itself can never be recalled. Time has its atmosphere as well as space. In time, as in space, distance throws a kindly veil over everything displeasing: smoothing away all asperities; concealing all offences; substituting beauty for ugliness. Calamities which threatened to destroy his earthly peace, the aged

fisherman reviews with wonder; so faint, and far, and insignificant they seem. Griefs, once heart-breaking, are in the retrospect toned and softened to a tender regret. The delights of his pursuit survive alone in memory.

Looking back along the years, he sees the road his feet have travelled marked, at intervals, by days that rise above the common level. Probably there is one pre-eminent above the rest. It may not have been a day of great achievement: the day distinguished by the capture of his largest trout; the day he carried home, with pardonable pride, the fish all others had essayed in vain to circumvent; the day capricious fate surprised him with the success of his life. It may, on the contrary, have been a day of small things: a day without a stirring incident; a calm, placid, even day on which his thoughts pursued the tenor of their way unvexed by violent emotions either of pleasure or of pain. Just such a day is that enshrined for ever in my memory. It was spent on a Border stream; a tiny mountain burn, across which, at its broadest, even the angler approaching middle-age might leap without fear of immersion. A prolonged shower had slightly raised the volume of the water and rendered it perceptibly opaque—with an opalescent opacity suggestive of the

presence of milk in it—but by noon the rain had ceased, and during the remainder of the day, except when some great white cloud, sweeping athwart the azure spaces of the sky, obscured his rays, the sun smiled down encouragement upon our efforts. It was a day on which all things combined to promote the pleasure of the angler. It was delightfully warm; the light was favourable—since I was successful; and the wind, though too high for perfect comfort, blew straight up the rock-encumbered cleugh through which the little burn ran gaily singing on its way to union with the classic Tweed.

I have had days of larger gains, of heavier fish and fish in greater numbers, but I can recall no day more bright, more full of joy than that. It held no small exasperations; not once was I caught up or placed in a position of the slightest difficulty. I met with no disappointments; I was aware of the utmost possibilities of the puny stream, and the modest hope in which I had approached it in the morning was more than fulfilled when, at the close of day, I took down my rod and reluctantly prepared to leave its banks. I fished, too, with a detachment of mind, an interest in the moment, in what I was doing rather than in what I had done or might yet do, that was quite unusual.

I did not exercise man's prerogative of looking before and after.

There was much delicate pleasure in whipping out the dainty little trout, a pleasure simpler than that involved in the capture of larger fish, since it was unmixed with fear of their escape. What matter if they did occasionally shake themselves free of the hook and live to afford sport on other days to other anglers. I was seeking to break no records, to beat no competitors; my pleasure was in the occupation, not in its results, and a fish more or less in the basket was neither here nor there. It was a day of unalloyed if subdued happiness, and it left no unpleasant memories behind it; no disquieting regrets for opportunities neglected, no unavailing reflections over what might have been.

The charm of angling, its uncertainty, finds expression in the universal greeting of the fisherman, "What luck?" The breezy salutation is generally acknowledged with cheerfulness, and answered more or less veraciously, but there are those to whom it proves an insurmountable offence. It wounds their self-love. They resent the imputation on their skill. Their success is ascribed to the favour of the gods; they prefer to believe it the reward of merit. Luck may be

responsible for their failures; for a full creel they are indebted to their own art.

But the angler's greeting involves a misconception. To the thought it conveys there is no corresponding reality. It embodies the conviction that slight and isolated incidents, incidents occurring spasmodically and not to be foreseen, are mere casual happenings independent of causation. We conceive them as unrelated to anything by which they have been preceded. We call them matters of chance, and dismiss them as incapable of explanation. In enabling us to give expression to our sense of the haphazard character of nature's methods, the words *chance*, *fortune*, *luck*, serve a necessary purpose, and may not be dispensed with—even by those who deny the existence of the thing they signify, and on whose lips they are merely an admission of impotence to trace the hidden causes of events.

'Tis not in the angler to command success. There's a Divinity that shapes his ends contrive them how he may. He is in the hands of Fate. His results are determined before he has cast a fly on the water; were determined, indeed, at that vague period, the Beginning. His predestined victims are awaiting him; he will find them without fail in the place and at the hour appointed. Of the disappointments in front of him, he has no

prevision, but they are within the knowledge of Omniscience. In a world governed by law there is no room for the miraculous. Nature is not "all in favour of certainty in great laws and of uncertainty in small events." The most trivial incident is inevitable; happens of necessity; could not happen otherwise. It is but a link in an infinite chain of cause and effect.

> "With Earth's first Clay They did the Last Man's knead,
> And then of the Last Harvest sow'd the Seed:
> Yea, the first Morning of Creation wrote
> What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read."

The Mohammedan is justified in his belief in Kismet, and the doctrine of Predestination is in harmony with scientific thought. What shall be must be.

The luck of the tyro is proverbial. His friend, wearied of the fruitless application of his art, invites him to attempt a cast, and he complies. In the hands of the angler the rod is a simple implement of sport; in his, it becomes a magic wand; he waves it over the water, and the fish rush to his call. He throws a glamour o'er the trout, and to their enchanted eyes his flies, artlessly as he casts them, appear in the semblance of the most delectable of dainties.

Fortune, too, with customary fickleness, showers her favours on the undeserving stranger. He pays

a flying visit to a water until then unknown to him, and leaves it with the heaviest basket of the season, or in possession of the great trout to which the habitués have been for weeks assiduously, but vainly, devoting all their energies.

I have been but once afloat on the bosom of that Queen of Scottish Waters, the beautiful and famed Loch Lomond, and my stay was of short duration.

We landed, my friend and I, on the pier of the little village of Luss, in the midst of a storm of wind and rain that seemed portentous of a second Deluge. But though, outside, the elements were warring loudly, within the hotel their reigned a depressing quiet. Members of the staff moved noiselessly about, while in the smoking-room moped a party of dejected anglers, like another party in another place, "all silent and"—apparently—"all damned"; more dismal than mutes at a funeral, for their sorrow was unfeigned. They had been given occasion for their gloom. It was Friday evening, and the week seemed likely to expire without witnessing the capture of a fish. Our prospects, painted in hope's richest hues, became

at once an uninviting monochrome in grey. We assumed the prevailing tone.

But though grief may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning. The following day broke bright and sunny, and its radiance was communicated to our thoughts. After an early breakfast, despatched in haste, we embarked under the care of the genial John M'Kellar, whose cheery optimism dispelled all that remained of our fears, and awoke our hopes anew.

"What do you think of the day?" we asked, as our barque was launched upon the deep.

"I like the look o't," was the reply, "though the win' micht be a wee thing heavier. But it'll maybe rise gin twelve o'clock, an' if it does we should get a fish; yesterday's rain must hae brocht some up."

"Where will you take us?" we next enquired, although in our ignorance of the water his answer was unlikely to instruct us much.

"I'll tak ye," said he, "to the Rhu Point; if there's a sawmon aboot at a' it'll be there. But mind ye," he warned us, "there's twa boats aheid o' us, an' I wudna wunner but they'll hae gruppit onything that's gaun."

As we had only a few hours at our disposal and were anxious to multiply our chances, we each put out a trolling-rod, while with our fly-rods we cast industri-

ously to leeward as the boat was rowed leisurely along the shore. Fortune befriended us. The boatman's sanguine forecast was abundantly fulfilled, and his fear of the fishermen in front of us was proved to have been groundless. Breathlessly expectant, we were just rounding the pleonastically-named Rhu Point when my companion—who occupied the stern—casting his fly-rod hurriedly aside threw himself upon his trolling-rod and raised it high in air. While I was still speculating on the reason of his flurry, the great stone which held my line in check was jerked with a clatter to the bottom of the boat, my reel emitted the prolonged scream so dear to the ears of the angler, and my rod, becoming violently convulsed, displayed an alarming disposition to plunge into the loch.

"It's the grun'!" cried John in accents of dismay.

"No it's not the ground!" I shouted in reply, "but the confounded fish has fouled my minnow."

Even as I spoke, however, my friend's salmon sprang from the water forty yards away. As my line maintained an almost vertical direction, and my rod

continued to behave as if possessed, it was obvious that John and I were both in error. Each minnow had successfully allured a fish.

In the experience of the boatman the incident was unprecedented, and it had on him a singular effect. Excitement overwhelmed him. The very boat, thrilling through all her timbers, seemed to share his perturbation as net in hand he sat tremblingly awaiting the event. He was, for the moment, incapable of action ; had the fish come quickly to the surface, we must have been deprived of his assistance in reducing them into possession. Even the faculty of speech forsook him ; not until the first tumultuous upheaval of surprise subsided did his whirling thoughts find utterance. "It beats a'," he falteringly exclaimed, when his tongue at length resumed its office ; "I've fi'fished-this loch-for-fi'five an' twenty year-an' I've ne'never seen-the li'like o' that before." Happily his agitation quickly passed, and by the time we were ready for his intervention his hand had quite regained its accustomed skill. But it was long before he ceased to wonder at our amazing luck.

Since, when the cook exposed its internal anatomy, it was discovered that my fish was filled with ripening ova, I am disposed to question the accuracy of the

gentleman who had so confidently assured me that it was a male. It is, I think, more likely that he was not quite so well informed as he supposed than that nature had produced a miracle.

The angler evokes my admiration. I contemplate his wide and varied knowledge with respectful awe, and marvel at the intelligence displayed in its collection. Nothing escapes his quick perception. Even the mind of the trout is an open book in which he reads with fluency. He apprehends the inmost thought of that surprising fish and has a ready explanation of its every action. If, at times, I find his explanation unconvincing, it is possibly because of my obtuseness. Once, embittered by repeated disappointment, I asked a brother angler why, since they were evidently not in quest of food, the salmon and the sea-trout were leaping in such numbers and so actively. "I thought everybody knew that!" was his reply. "They are on their way to the redds, but as they are uncertain of the distance they have yet to travel, they are rising with the object of ascertaining their position in the stream." I was reduced to a condition of abject humility; the solution of a problem so absurdly simple should have been obvious to the meanest understanding. But this is a digression.

Though the angler is convinced that his pastime is a lottery in which the chances are often in favour of the trout, he is regardless of omens. He is a firm believer in luck, but he is without the small superstitions by which the professional fisherman directs his conduct. In a casual meeting with the harmless, necessary cat, he perceives no presage of evil, nor does the sight of an errant hare loping aimlessly across his path fill him with disquieting forebodings of mishap. To him it is a matter of indifference with which foot he first touches the floor as he gets up to greet the morn. In his unconcern—not to mention his enthusiasm for the chase—he escapes the temptation which occasionally assails the man to whom the fish is a precarious means of livelihood, not a source of exquisite delight. He does not, when the wind is in the chimney and the rain is on the roof, cautiously project the limb he knows to be unlucky, and then withdrawing it, thank whatever gods he worships that since the signs are unpropitious he need not yet abandon the luxury of bed. The angler finds nothing auspicious—or otherwise—in the flight of

birds, and the only entrails which interest him are the entrails of the silk-worm. When he scans the heavens, or taps the barometer, or notes the direction of the wind, he is not in search of auguries ; his purpose is eminently reasonable.

If the angler would possess his soul in the quiet befitting his pursuit and enjoy a future undistressed by rankling memories of avoidable disaster he should cultivate habits of order and precision. He should be all that, as Mr. Lang himself admits, Mr. Andrew Lang is not. The author of *Angling Sketches*—and a few other things—need not be taken too seriously, but whether truth or fiction the *Confessions of a Duffer* conveys a useful moral. When, for the first time, I read these voluntary revelations of a hopeless inefficiency, I seemed to dream. They were strangely familiar. Staring at me from the printed page I saw an accurate reflection of my own unhappy character ; my absence of mind, my lack of foresight, my tendency to let things drift, trusting in simple—very simple—faith that a kindly Providence would intervene to save me from the consequences of my ineptitude. That

Heaven helps those that help themselves I know, but I am upheld by a forlorn hope that it occasionally helps the helpless. Like Mr. Lang, I am a duffer, but unlike him I am a discontented duffer. I am not resigned; on the contrary, I am ever striving to escape the bonds within which nature has confined me, and find it hard to accept the inevitable failure of my efforts. Mr. Lang neglects to fasten the various pieces of his rod; so do I. I resemble him, too, in the frequency with which I smash my tops. But I am capable of a feat he does not seem to have achieved; I can lay my rod on the ground beside me and, immediately forgetting it, place a heavy foot across its middle joint. He is always being hung up; if there be within reach anything to which my flies can form an attachment, it is discovered with fatal certainty. To the lips of a trout alone do they show a consistent aversion. Since I rarely employ the lure I never look as if a "shoal of fierce minnows had attacked me," but I invariably return from the water bristling with flies.

Should I, by accident, hook a fish of size, the paralysis of terror overcomes me. With heart in mouth, and every limb a-tremble, I stand helplessly

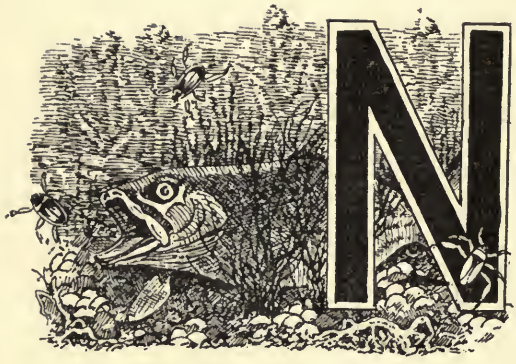
bewildered on the bank and watch my quarry while, in his efforts to escape, he leisurely proceeds to exercise the appalling ingenuity for which he is distinguished. And his purpose is easily accomplished; few and simple are the devices to which he finds it needful to resort. Immediate success, it is true, does not invariably attend him, but if, when apparently exhausted and about to yield, he suddenly renews the struggle to be free, he is sure to catch me unprepared. Taken by surprise I part with what little wit is left me,—and, flaunting a triumphant tail, he is away.

Mr. Lang's waders sometimes admit water. How is it discharged? If in a moment of forgetfulness or in his eagerness to reach a rising fish he has gone beyond his depth, and filled his waders to the brim, has he climbed laboriously up the bank and, lying on his back, raised legs into the air under the impression—which he quickly and unpleasantly found to be erroneous—that the water would escape as it had gone in?

No, Mr. Lang is not alone in the possession of an enthusiasm which compels him to the stream, and of an incompetence which makes him the unhappiest of men when there.

CHAPTER II

THE FLY



NO problem of interest to the angler has excited livelier controversy than that which concerns the dressing of the lure. The Englishman asserts that success in fly-fishing is to be attained only by the use of an accurate imitation of the fly disporting on the water; the Scotsman is convinced that the trout is catholic in his tastes, and, when on the rise, readily and cheerfully takes any lure that bears the semblance of an insect. Neither the quasi-scientific nor the avowedly rule-of-thumb practitioner has any difficulty in producing abundant evidence of the efficacy of his method —and the conclusive testimony with which each supports his case gives countenance to the contention of the Scot.

My own experience tends to confirm that of my fellow-countrymen. Like them I have found, or (since in matters of angling it is wise to speak with diffidence) fancy that I have found, that when the trout is disinclined for food the most seductive-looking lure is passed over him in vain, but that when abstinence has given an edge to his appetite the angler may offer him anything—in reason—he pleases, satisfied that it will not be refused. Once only have the trout seemed to me to show a decided preference for a particular fly, and on that occasion their choice was a small Red Hackle. With that lure I had, during the morning, secured a modest success, but sport was quiet until mid-day when the trout began to rise languidly and in small numbers to a little ephemera, a fly much too delicately beautiful for imitation. Willing, however, to meet what seemed their wishes, I mounted a Greenwell's Glory, the closest approach to the object of their attention I possessed, but they would have none of it; they ignored it entirely, and continued to display an unabated affection for the hackle, unlike though it was to the fly that was "up."

The incident lends some support to the assertion

that the angler will sometimes obtain less pleasure from an imperfect imitation of, than from a lure which bears no likeness to, the fly on the water—which suggests that the origin of the system so popular beyond the Border is not far to seek. The happiest imitation of the natural fly leaves much to be desired; is, indeed, but little better than a travesty of the original, and it probably succeeds, not because it is like, but because it is unlike, the object it misrepresents.

Those who plead the cause of the English School will have a sounder case when their practice and their theories conform, and they have not only ceased to employ lures dressed in the likeness of, no one knows what, but have succeeded in producing an artificial fly bearing an approximate resemblance to the thing it is meant to simulate. The artificial fly is often a marvel of art, extremely creditable to the mind which conceived it and the hands by which it was wrought, but I have not yet seen one that could for a moment be confounded with its prototype except—except by the trout, I was about to say, though I am by no means sure that even when he does take it, that fish mistakes it for the original. The unprejudiced—and unimaginative—reader who compares a natural fly with the most life-

like image of it designed by man, will have some difficulty in perceiving the resemblance between them. The points in which they are alike are few and obscure; the distinctions many and obtrusive. If the unlikeness is obvious to the eye of man it should leap to the eye of a creature so quick of sight that, as we are confidently assured, it unfailingly detects the most trifling departure from nature even in the dark; so keenly observant that, though it gets but a passing glimpse of it, it rejects a fly because of some abnormality of colour so minute as to escape our dull, imperfect vision.

The latest and most strenuous advocate of the imitation of nature theory confesses his faith in the following words:—"You may not raise fish by plying lures in imitation of insects on the water or due to be there, but if you do not you will certainly be unsuccessful with others." The truth of the statement is unassailable, but it would be quite as true were it transposed. You may fail to raise fish by employing lures not in imitation of the fly on the water or due to be there, but if you do fail, you are unlikely to succeed with those that are.

The writer in question possesses strong convictions. He is satisfied that the use of a lure dressed in the likeness of a natural fly is essential to success. A fly evolved from the inner consciousness of the angler

desirous of providing the trout with a captivating novelty may be pleasing to the eye of its creator but has no charm for the fish. Unfortunately for his consistency, he publishes a list of what he believes to be exact imitations. It would be interesting to learn what they imitate. Some are certainly recognised efforts to reproduce, in fur and feather, the beauties of known insects; for the majority we are indebted to the whim or to the fancy of the maker. The author, to be sure, affirms that each is representative of an object in nature, but we must be forgiven if we refuse to accept the affirmation. It does not appeal to our reason and it is contradicted by our knowledge. Many, even of those who maintain the general superiority of the English system, admit that, at times, the trout reject the most truthful simulacrum of the natural insect for a purely "fancy fly." He is an exception. He asserts that the trout are to be enticed only by means of a perfect imitation of something with which they are familiar, and, apparently in an effort to save the situation, he seeks to persuade us that in the ready reception occasionally given even to our most fanciful invention we have evidence of its relation to a living prototype. The angler may be all unconscious of the identity of the insect on which his lure is modelled; may, indeed, have

GOT HIM !

the best of reasons for believing that it is modelled on none, but his ignorance is not shared by his quarry. That his artificial fly is taken by the fish proves beyond dispute that it is the counterpart of something within their knowledge.

That the professed follower of nature's teaching permits himself the use of lures for which she affords no sanction is not, perhaps, a very serious offence ; it is but one of the little eccentricities which mark his practice and proves entirely harmless. It is, however, astounding to find him employing a variety of artificial flies all bearing the same name and all, no matter how dissimilar their characters, posing as the counterfeit presentments of the same original.

I have before me several illustrations of the fly known as the February Red. They provide us with a valuable object lesson. They expose the hollowness of the fisherman's belief that he is necessarily fishing with a lure dressed in the likeness of nature because it bears the name of a known fly. The ground of his convictions does not stand investigation. His sincerity is above suspicion, but in the ease with which he permits himself to be deceived he displays a singular credulity. In simple confidence, he accepts his flies from those who, he trusts, know more of entomology than he ;

or he makes them for himself, and, like many another artist, is blind to the imperfections of his own art.

It is an axiom of Euclid that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another, but the flies under observation are so unlike that they have nothing in common save the name—and the possession of a barb. They are far from being equal to one another, and still farther from equality with the same thing. Reference to the Coloured Plate will at once reveal to the reader the difference between them and between any one of them and the real February Red. Fig. 1 represents the natural fly; Fig. 2 the fly as conceived by a writer on angling, who, for convenience, may be designated A.; Figs. 3 and 4 are reproduced with as much fidelity as possible from a recent work by B. Curiously enough the authors referred to are both Scotsmen.

The members of no species of insect present absolute uniformity of character. While exhibiting a general family resemblance, they vary both in size and colour. One "hatch," too, may differ slightly from another, and in some species of Ephemeridæ there is a decided distinction between the sexes. As regards colour, Stewart offered to show to his readers "a Mayfly almost black and a Mayfly almost yellow and of all the intermediate

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4.

Fig. 5.

Fig. 6.

Fig. 7.

Fig. 8.

Fig. 9.

Fig. 10.

Fig. 11.

Fig. 12.

shades." Since, therefore, the natural February Reds are not all alike, a slight diversity among the angler's imitations is quite legitimate. The lure may vary within the limits prescribed by nature without sacrificing its claim to be considered representative of the natural fly. But the divergencies which exist among the flies I am considering are not individual; are not even varietal; they are specific, and it is impossible to believe that these flies are all dressed on the same model. They do not represent one, but several, species of fly—if they can be truthfully said to represent anything. The variety they display would be surprising enough if they embodied the conceptions of different artists; it is quite confounding to discover in B.'s book two examples of the fly so utterly unlike that even the assurance of the text fails to persuade us that they are the same. They cannot both be right, but they may both be wrong—as indeed they are. A cursory examination of the Plate will suffice to show that in neither are the features of the natural fly reproduced with even an approach to accuracy. Were the trout possessed of a fraction of the intelligence with which we credit him he would detect their unreality at a glance. It is impossible that in a good light and with time for even hasty observation he can perceive a likeness between

things so far apart. Yet, though B.'s examples of the February Red are so unlike I have no doubt that he employs both in equal confidence; when angling with either he is probably quite sincere in his persuasion that he is offering the trout an exact "imitation of the fly on the water or due to be there."

The writer whom I have designated A. assures us, gravely, that to be efficient the imitation must be perfect; the natural fly must be reproduced in "all its delicacy and grace." Fig. 2 illustrates his easily satisfied conception of a perfect imitation. In his case, it is true, some allowance must be made for the crude quality of his art; but however indulgently we treat his pictured representation of the fly in question, its resemblance to the original eludes detection.

The February Red is not alone; there are others whose identity is quite as carefully concealed. Figs. 5, 6, 7, and 8 represent the Alder with several of its alleged presentments. While these bear a general resemblance to each other, they vary in details unlikely to escape the least observant. Fig. 8 is dressed with a dark hackle; Figs. 6 and 7 with hackles of a warm ginger colour; the last is furnished with a "whisk," an ornament with which the natural fly is not adorned. The remaining figures illustrate the Sand-Fly, real and

unreal. The artist in fly-dressing has, on the whole, been happier in his efforts to reproduce the perfection of nature in this than in the other flies chosen for illustration, but he is still far short of the attainment of an assured success. Fig. 12 is, in the colour and the attitude of the wings, ridiculously unlike its prototype, and the difference between it and Fig. 2 from the same work is so slight as to be almost imperceptible.

A. and B. are earnest advocates of the system they espouse. They are convinced believers in the doctrines of their cult. Since, however, the evidence with which they endeavour to promote their cause excites to scepticism rather than to faith, their missionary efforts are unlikely to induce the unbeliever to forsake his unbelief. The conflict between their words and the pictorial reproductions of the lures they use is much too obvious. Had they refrained from illustration we might have been persuaded that their case was good, but in providing us with a means of contrasting their practice with their theories they have foolishly betrayed themselves. They tell us, quite sincerely, that in the construction of the artificial fly they follow nature's teaching; it will be long before they overtake the object of their chase.

If the trout fail to see the distinction between A.'s representation of the February Red and those of B., or

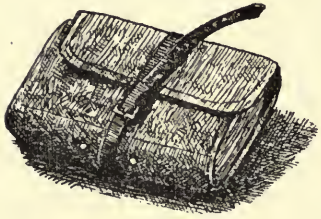
be capable of confounding any of them with the original, they are not particularly exacting critics, and, in his choice of flies, the angler has no occasion to be more fastidious than they.

The angler who considers it necessary to present the trout with an accurate imitation of the fly which is up, must of course give thoughtful attention to that which is in season. There has been published lately an instructive work on fly-fishing, embellished with numerous illustrations of a great variety of artificial flies artfully arranged to suit—the fancy of the arranger. Since we are without information to the contrary, the list, it appears, is to be considered applicable to the entire country. Though several degrees of latitude separate Caithness from Cornwall, the insect enjoying its little day in the Duchy is assumed to be simultaneously on the wing in the northern county. That the appearance of a fly in the south probably anticipates by some days, at least, that of its cousin at the other extremity of our island is a matter of no concern.

These illustrations are extremely interesting for the beauty of the art with which the artificial flies are reproduced; they are a triumph of colour-printing, but that they have any practical value for the angler he may take leave to doubt.

The author's manner is not that of nature. He adheres too closely to the calendar. His distinctions are absolute. He draws a sharp line of demarcation between the months. The fly which the angler finds attractive on the evening of the 30th of April is ignored by the trout on the morning of May-day. Occasionally we encounter on the list, a fly the seductiveness of which outlasts the month; sometimes one that, having, for a brief period, ceased to enjoy the confidence of the fickle fish, returns to favour later in the season. The principle on which the catalogue has been compiled is not easily discovered. There is no difficulty in assigning a season to the natural fly, but what of the fly that owes its being to the angler's fancy? We are, it is true, assured that the list contains no fly without its prototype in nature, but the assurance is unsupported by the slightest evidence. Is there any available? If so, it is to be regretted that it has been withheld from us. In disclosing the identity of lures which we and their creators have been accustomed to regard as mere abstractions, its production would provide us with some startling information. The method of our author would be found less arbitrary than, to our ignorance, it appears, and we should discover his occult reasons for the classification of the artificial fly according to a scheme

so obviously without a basis in experience. We should learn, for instance, why the employment of the Soldier Palmer, a fly accepted freely by the trout in May, is properly restricted to July, and why the Zulu, whose charm is exercised successfully the season through, should be withdrawn from the seclusion which the wallet grants, only when, in April and again in August, circumstances justify its liberation.



The statement that the trout refuse the imitation of a fly which is out of season is not, on the face of it, incredible, but to affirm that he makes seasonal distinctions among lures the product entirely of human ingenuity, is absurd. Nor is the fly in season necessarily that which the trout prefers; it is conceivable that there are others for which he has a greater liking, and that when he rejects the feathered image of the fly which is or might be up, in favour of another of a different character, it is because he sees in the latter something more pleasing to his taste.

One gathers from the literature of angling that its colour is the only feature of the lure with which the angler has occasion to concern himself; the trout fails

to appreciate fidelity of line and he is but an indifferent arithmetician. In external conformation the artificial fly need bear little or no resemblance to its prototype, and the number of legs with which it is provided is at the discretion of the maker. Since it seems, however, that the highly sophisticated chalk-stream trout have developed a rudimentary sense of number and no longer accept a fly until satisfied that it is in possession of the normal complement of feet, the Hampshire angler should cease to confine his solicitude entirely to the colour of his lure. Such, at any rate, is the opinion of one ingenious and observant dry-fly fisherman. Finding the trout regardless of his artifice, and determined, if possible, to know the reason why, he caught one of the flies with which they were engaged and subjected it to careful and minute examination. The result surprised him. He discovered the interesting and hitherto unsuspected fact that, while his lure was furnished with quite a multitude of legs, the natural insect owned but—eight! The secret of his failure was revealed to him, and the remedy proved simple; he removed the superfluous hackle and with it the indifference of the fish. The flies once rejected and despised were then taken with an avidity which suggested that, as amended, they were even more natural than nature herself.

The gentleman is not alone; there are others on whose minds has dawned the thought that the colour of the lure is scarcely more important than its form. To one of these we are indebted for the information that "The wings of the fly should be dressed so as to be distinctly apart both in the water and out of it." To dress the lure in the fashion he prescribes is, he declares, to give it a more life-like appearance. He is mistaken. To provide the artificial fly with outspread wings is not necessarily to impart to it the aspect of vitality; on the contrary, it may be to advertise the fact that it is counterfeit. What semblance of reality it exhibits in the air is lost the moment it becomes submerged. Neither to the fish nor to the fisher has it ever chanced, to see beneath the surface of the water an insect in the attitude of flight.

"The flies," says another writer, "which are most successful when sunk are precisely those which most closely resemble the 'creepers' (*sic*) of Ephemerids." Curiously enough, the writer, in illustration of his point, has selected that well-known fly, the Greenwell's Glory. His choice could scarcely have been more unfortunate. The statement that the flies

which are most successful when sunk are precisely those which most closely resemble, not the so-called creepers, but the nymphæ of Ephemerids, bears the impress of truth; it is certainly based in reason, and is just what a knowledge of insect life and of the habits of the trout would lead us to expect. That, however, the Greenwell's Glory is one of these flies is more than doubtful. The resemblance between that lure, with its prominent, upstanding wings, and the practically wingless nymph is not easily perceived. Than the Greenwell's Glory there are few flies less like what, according to the author quoted, they are supposed to represent. If it resembles anything at all, it is the imago of an Ephemerid, and its place on the cast is as upper dropper; that is, it should be fished as close to the surface as possible. Not that the situation in which they find it is likely to make the slightest difference to the fish, but it should please the angler to know that he is treading the path prescribed for him by nature. Whether he submerges his Greenwell's Glory or retains it as near the surface as wet-fly methods let him, will not seriously affect the weight of his basket; in the first case, however, his practice is purely empirical, while in the second he has the satisfaction of feeling that it is conducted on scientific principles.

If he desires to be thoroughly scientific he will employ the fly dry.

The merely human eye is incapable of distinguishing the colour of an opaque object viewed against the light, but the physical conditions which limit the vision of man appear to leave the vision of the trout unfettered. That amazing fish discriminates instantly and easily between two closely allied shades of colour even in the dark, or when seen against the sky or through the medium of several feet of broken and discoloured water. Not all the evidence arrayed in its defence can persuade us to believe it.

The fish which perceives nothing unusual in the abnormal anatomy of the artificial fly is unlikely to have his apprehension roused by a slight, or even by a considerable, anomaly of colour. Not, perhaps, that colour is altogether without importance; there is a general agreement even among those who scoff at the innocent faith of the ardent worshippers at Nature's shrine, that the fish is not uninfluenced by the colour of the lure. But they find the trout inconstant in his affections; the colour which to-day attracts his roving fancy, to-morrow lacks all charm for him. Stewart, the characteristic feature of whose *Practical Angler* is strong common-sense,—in many things we think alike—was of opinion

that certain colours are more fatally fascinating to the trout than others, not because they bear a closer resemblance to those of the natural fly, but because they are more readily detected. They do not deceive the trout; they merely attract his attention. In the dusk a light fly is more successful than a dark by reason of its greater visibility, not because of its superior seductiveness. The artifice of the dark fly may be as skilfully concealed, but in the gathering gloom its presence on the water is less easily perceived. Could Stewart revisit the glimpses of the moon, his views would probably be found to coincide with those of Sir Herbert Maxwell, for it is obvious that in his discussion of the artificial fly he is less concerned about its colour than its tone.

Even on a question so simple as this, however, anglers are still far from unanimity. While agreeing that the colour of the lure should suit that of the water and the quantity and the quality of the light, they are widely divergent in their conceptions of the means by which the desired harmony is to be attained. We are advised by one to employ a dark fly for a dull day or a brown water, and a light fly for a bright day or a clear water, while in the opinion of another we should adopt a practice diametrically opposed to that. In a

multitude of counsellors there is said to be wisdom; in a multitude of anglers one need look for nothing save confusion. Personally, I have seldom had occasion to suppose that the colour of my flies played an important part in my success—or failure; I am doubtful if my results were seriously affected even by the depth or the lightness of their tone. Once only, as I have already said, have I been satisfied that the trout deliberately selected one among the many flies of which I offered them a choice, and on that occasion their fancy did not stray. Whether the water sparkled in the light of a burning sun or grew dull and leaden under a lowering sky, they remained steadfast in their affection for a Red Hackle. Their constancy was admirable. It seemed that I had at last discovered that thing of myth, the fly peculiar to the water; but should fate again grant me an opportunity of seeking the infrequent trout of Rannoch, I shall not be surprised to find their love transferred to quite another variety of lure.

We really know nothing of the way in which the eye of the trout is affected by the colour of our flies. The subject is the theme of unending discussion; discussion which is barren of result and leaves us just as ignorant as before. We speculate and theorise, but our theories, spun from broken threads of knowledge, we fail to

weave into a sound coherent fabric of belief. In the very diversity of our opinions is evidence enough of the fragmentary character of the information on which they rest.

It is, with the angler, an article of faith that for every water there is a specific fly without which he fishes it in vain. Eager and hungry trout may be springing all around him, but his efforts to entice them are of no avail if among the treasures of his wallet he has failed to include the sole object of their desire. Though the belief is universal, it rests on a basis of very uncertain stability; or, to be accurate, of very certain instability. It has been handed down to us, and we accept it, as we accept many more important things in life, without question. It is so much easier to acquiesce in opinions already formed than to form opinions of our own. Man is by nature indolent, and the angler, being human, pursues the path of least resistance; he fares along the beaten track. He follows, undoubting, the tradition which bids him employ a particular fly for a particular water, and, following it, finds it justified by his success. His experience confirms and assists in perpetuating it. It is to be regretted that he so rarely puts it to the proof; the occasional employment of a lure other than that to which

the affections of the trout are said to be exclusively confined would certainly convince him that it is quite unworthy of his confidence.

I have been told so frequently that there was but one counterfeit presentment of a fly to the charms of which the trout in the water I was about to fish were at all susceptible, and have so frequently disproved the statement, that I have long ceased to regard it. It never influences my practice, yet where others succeed in taking trout I seldom entirely fail, and sometimes it happens that at the end of the day my basket is much less easily carried than that of the knowing gentleman by whom I have been informed in the morning that my flies were "neither of the right size nor the right colour for this water." Long experience has convinced me that the prejudice ascribed to the fish is really owned by the fisher.

Some years ago I fished a Highland loch, of which we learn from that veracious chronicler, Mr. E. Watson Lyall, that on it "Largish flies are best, with body not too heavy and a full wing." My old gillie maintained a discreet silence as he watched my preparations for the chase, but speech is not our only medium of expression, and his face was eloquent of the nature of his thoughts. It betrayed a disapproval of my methods

he was too polite to put into words. My flies were so-called Spiders, small—Nos. 2 and 3, new scale—and lightly dressed, and the contrast between them and those habitually in use evidently filled him with forebodings of a dull, uninteresting time. He was paid to take me on the water and provide me with an opportunity of obtaining sport, and he would earn his pay, but, his bearing plainly said, if instead of devoting myself to the legitimate purpose of my presence on the loch I was pleased to seek amusement in toying with the dainty little trifles, I need not look to him for even a pretence of sympathy with me in my foolishness. When, however, he realized that neither the *Sportsman's Guide* nor the traditions of the loch were so entirely trustworthy as he had supposed; when he found that day after day my basket was regularly twice the weight of that of any other angler on the water, he gradually assumed a more cheerful air and showed an increasing desire to provide me with entertainment—he became even enthusiastic. Within a week, he made a voluntary confession which revealed a mind still open to new impressions: "I'm peginnin'," he acknowledged, "to pelieve in the smaal flies after aal."

Not every boatman, however, suffers in pained silence; many are much too ready to remonstrate with the angler on what they, in their superior knowledge of the water, conceive to be his ignorance.

"Whit kin' o' flees are thae, sir?" enquired my Loch Leven boatman when, for the first time, I prepared to cast a fly within the shadow of Queen Mary's castle.

"Flies?" I answered. "They're artificial flies, of course."

"Fine I ken they're artifeecial flees; but whit are ye gaun to dae wi' them?" was the rejoinder; "ye're no expeckin' to catch fish wi' them, are ye?"

"Well, I did have that expectation. Indeed, it is in the hope of catching fish that I am here."

"Weel, ye'll get nane!" was the confident reply. "No wi' them things onyway; the troots in Loch Leven 'll no look at a flee they're no accustomed to."

As my flies were as different as possible from the Red and Teals, the Heckum Peckums, and the Woodcock and Hare's Ears with which the fish were so familiar that they might have been thought to have grown weary of them, the boatman's gloomy prediction

had every chance of being fulfilled had it been based on reason. Probably he would have seen to its fulfilment, no matter what its basis, had we been alone in the boat together. It was, however, entirely falsified by the result; but that John's belief in the superior efficacy of the flies the fish were "accustomed to" was shaken in the least I had no ground for hope; his mind was obviously much less plastic than that of the ancient Highlander already mentioned.

During a brief interval of leisure once spent on a little loch which would be one of the most prolific salmon and sea-trout waters in Scotland were the short river of easy ascent by which it communicates with the sea less cruelly harried by the net, I had ample reason to suspect the justice of our faith in the "peculiar fly." On entering the smoking-room of the hotel on the evening of my arrival, I found it occupied by two gentlemen whose employment indicated that they, too, were devoted followers of Walton. The table at which they sat was littered with fishing material of all kinds, and in front of each lay open an enormous fly-book, large as a family Bible, and filled to overflowing with all sorts and conditions of artificial flies. They were obviously engaged preparing for the morrow, and were as earnest in their occupation as if life and death hung

upon the issue—as indeed it did. One of them, a fisher of men as well as of trout, was painfully embarrassed by his riches. Irresolutely, in an aimless, helpless kind of way, he fingered his fly-book, unable to discover the thing he sought. Taking out fly after fly, he examined each carefully a moment, and then replaced it hesitatingly, as if not quite sure that, after all, it might not be the very thing required. Even his final decision was marked by doubt and uncertainty; he seemed unconvinced of the wisdom of his choice and to be of two minds whether to abide by his resolution or return the flies selected to his book and begin his search anew.

The other, a person of character, was quite untroubled by doubts. He knew, with a knowledge that was absolute, knew, perhaps, better than they themselves what fly the fish desired, and made his choice without a moment's hesitation. He was not of these feeble folk for whom every question has another side, and who waver and vacillate between conflicting opinions, unable to determine which to choose. To him decision was always easy; he saw but one side,

and was quite unconscious of the possible existence of a second. The suggestion that he might occasionally err would have been received by him in blank amazement ; he was obviously incapable of entertaining the conception. His self-confidence was unlimited, and he was ready to resolve the difficulties of others as he would have resolved his own—had he ever encountered any. When his companion, unable to make up his mind, appealed to him for aid, he responded with alacrity, and pronounced his judgment with a finality that was delightful.

It seemed that they had forgathered during the day with an ancient native to whom the loch was an open secret. He knew the lie of every fish and could foretell, unerringly, the circumstances in which, and the lure by means of which, it was to be seduced. There was in the water nothing hidden which had not been revealed to him. So precise and accurate was his information and so mathematically certain his results, that to him angling must have been deprived of all its charm. He had arranged to conduct them over the loch on the following morning, and they were revelling in the prospect of a success hitherto beyond their wildest dreams.

When their preparations were completed and they were at leisure to turn their thoughts to things of less

importance, the layman, addressing me, asked if he might see my flies. It appeared that I too was to gather of the crumbs that fell from his table. The request filled me with dismay; it was foolish, I know, but I hesitated to expose my poverty in the presence of so much wealth so ostentatiously displayed. Courtesy, however, forbade a refusal, and reluctantly producing the degraded remains of a once reputable fly-book, I placed them in his hands. The wretched old book had been in my possession for years, and had known much adversity; it had been times without number in the basket among my fish; it had been more than once in the water; and it had lain during an entire night on a Highland hillside, exposed to the fury of the elements. It was battered, and worn, and so decrepit that it threatened to fall to pieces at a touch. It was, besides, as thin, almost, as a shadow, for it held but the few flies I had deemed sufficient for the short stay I intended making at the inn. It was an object of pity, yet such as it was I passed it to him. He received it gingerly, and opened it with care, and glancing—a glance sufficed—at its poor contents, said, in accents of commiseration and contempt commingled, "Your flies are quite useless. Neither in size nor in colour are they at all suitable for this loch, and it will be miraculous if you take

a single fish with them. Besides," he added, "your boatman is a stupid and ignorant fellow who knows nothing of the water."

I was concerned to hear it, but suggested that my prospects might be less dismal than he supposed. I could not, I said, reasonably expect that a miracle would be wrought in my favour, but I hoped that, under Providence, even the incompetent gillie might place me in the way of an occasional trout less severely critical or hungrier than his fellows. "Your flies," he reiterated with an authority from which there was no appeal, "are of no use whatever, and it is not worth your while trying them. You may as well fish the hillside."

But that I am a diffident man, easily put down by a peremptory tone and manner, I should have hinted that as this was his first experience of the water, and he had, for quite three weeks, been whipping it in vain, his knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of the fish it held and of the particular harmony in colour with which alone they were to be allured, might not possess the extreme value he himself was inclined to place on it. Being, however, the kind of person I describe, I received his deliverance in becoming meekness—and retained my own opinion.

We embarked next morning: they cheerful and confident, encouraged by the presence of the master of the mysteries of the loch—who, like the M'Leans, had a boat of his own — I dejected and despairing, in the company of the disparaged boatman, whose lack of interest in our doings and whose general poverty of intelligence seemed to confirm the worst that had been said of him. But the Devil is not so black as he is painted, and Donald proved much less ignorant and incapable than he had been represented. It was not his fault that our results were meagre. The prediction that I should take no fish was not literally fulfilled; I did secure a few, but so few that the adverse criticism of my poor flies was almost, if not quite, justified by the event.

Disappointed, I returned to the hotel early in the evening and awaited, with what philosophy I might, the triumphant home-coming of the others and the inevitable "I told you so" when the insignificant result

of our day's labour was disclosed. I had not long to wait. Presently they appeared in the doorway, but not as I had expected. I had looked for faces beaming with delight; those I saw were wrapped in gloom. The buoyant and hopeful adventurers of the morning were downcast and sad; their unsubstantial castles in the air had been blown to the four winds of heaven. They were in no haste to expose the contents of their creels, and their manner did not invite enquiry as to the quality of the sport they had enjoyed. But indeed there was no need to enquire. Their dispirited mien told a plain tale, and I was filled with unchristian glee as it gradually came to light that their success had been even less than my own.

On the day after, an indignant fisher left the hotel shouting threats of vengeance—by writing to the *Times* in the usual manner of the Briton with a grievance—against all by whom he had been fraudulently induced to waste his time and his talents on an empty loch. His retreat was too precipitate.

Had he waited but twenty-four hours longer he would have learned that the loch was not quite empty, and the sight of the magnificent basket of fish which had succumbed to the flies so repugnant to their tastes might possibly—a remote possibility—have convinced him that, like the people down in Judee, he did not know everything.

I have heard an angler express surprise that the Coch-y-Bondhu should be taken by the trout in Scottish waters, and, conversely, that a fly successful in Scotland should be equally acceptable in Wales. Why should he have been surprised? Surely it would be astonishing were it otherwise. The trout in the two countries are of the same species; they possess the same instincts, the same desires, the same appetites, and with, perhaps, some trifling variations in detail, subsist on the same fare. These variations are not due to any innate distinction between the fish; they are the result of local conditions. They are not determined by the choice of trout; they are imposed on him from without. In his diet he is necessarily restricted to insects bred in his neighbourhood, but he is unlikely to refuse a member of a foreign species, even if he be capable of recognising it as foreign,

should it chance to stray his way. We know that he will take a lure resembling, to the human eye at least, nothing he has ever seen before; the fancy fly, though bearing a general resemblance to an insect, is unlike anything specific, yet it is frequently accepted by the trout without suspicion; and the artificial May-fly is sometimes highly successful where its prototype is quite unknown. Though the Coch-y-Bondhu bears a Welsh name, the little beetle in the likeness of which it is supposed to be dressed is not confined to the Principality. It is common, much too common, to the entire country. Though local in its distribution, it is found on many waters, but even if it were not, its imitation is so little life-like that it probably resembles, just as closely, something else familiar to the fish and for which it is mistaken. That, at any rate, is the ingenious hypothesis by which Mr. Francis Francis explains away the success of the artificial fly before the advent of the

natural insect. One wonders if the explanation is not just as applicable to other instances of the trout's utter indifference to the seasons about which the fisherman concerns himself so anxiously.

The devotee of the dry-fly is pictured as a super-fine person, between the wind and whose nobility the humble wet-fly angler may not pass. In his arrogance he assumes that he alone is entitled to the name of sportsman, and for all forms of angling save that he favours he manifests ineffable contempt. They are rude and primitive methods of essaying the capture of the trout; good enough for the amateur and the boy, but unworthy the high ideals of the finished artist. He alone is the "Compleat Angler." The deadliest insult you can offer him is to suggest him capable of fishing with a fly less dry than the Sahara or a Scotsman's humour. The dry-fly is the only lure becoming a gentleman and the dry-fly angler the highest product of evolution; something a breathless world has been awaiting from the beginning of time. A recent writer imputes to him a desire to "punch your nose" if you do not at once acknowledge the infinite superiority of his methods. He is too dainty a gentleman to do anything so rude. Not that he is incapable of rudeness, but that his rude-

ness finds expression in words, not deeds; in printed words that do not expose him to the risk of immediate physical retaliation. Of retaliation other than physical he has no fear; in his blatant self-conceit he is impervious to the slings and arrows of adverse criticism, and verbal abuse merely affects him with a pained sense of the coarseness of his abuser. It shocks his delicate sensibilities, but fails to reach his intelligence.

That is, I know, a libellously untrue rendering of the character of the dry-fly man, but if it resembles, in any respect, the likeness in which he appears to the angling public, he has himself to blame. His enemies are those of his own household, and he, more than any one else, has cause to pray that he may be delivered out of the hands of his friends. It is to one of his fraternity we owe the contemptuous description of wet-fly fishing as the "chuck and chance it system"—a description significant of much.

In reality he is not the stupidly prejudiced person some of his foolish advocates would lead us to believe. While maintaining, as he has a perfect right to do, the general superiority of the floating fly, he readily admits its limitations. He knows that it is not of universal application, and, in circumstances which preclude its

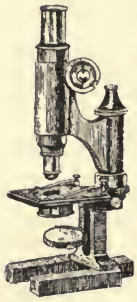
use, is not above employing the sunk fly. He has too much good sense to deny himself a pleasure because he is unable to pursue it in the manner he prefers.

I admire his method, which seems to me the very perfection of fly-fishing. I envy him, too, the possession of the qualities by the exercise of which he attains success: the untiring patience in which he awaits a rise; the self-control which curbs his eagerness as, like the noble Red Man, he creeps stealthily towards his prey; the skill with which he wields his rod and deftly drops his fly on the exact spot aimed at. His practice is excellent, but I have little sympathy with his theories. His rigid adherence to the use of an imitation of the fly that is "up"; the employment of the microscope in the construction of his lures that they may resemble—in colour—to the shadow of a shade the natural insects in the image of which they are dressed; the elaborate care expended on his efforts to prevent his lure from dragging; all give increase of zest to his sport if, possibly, they add little

to the weight of his creel. The much feared drag, at least, must surely be of trifling moment since it is a spectacle to which the trout are thoroughly accustomed. In the obvious wake by which the water-cricket, the caddis-fly, the whirligig-beetle, and many other insects betray their course along the water the fish see nothing to excite their fears. It is true that a fly floating passively on the stream does not produce a drag, but the trout is unlikely to flee from it in ridiculous alarm if on some rare occasion it should provide him with such evidence of active life. Mr. W. Earl Hodgson relates the following incident:—"When," he says, "it was time to go in for luncheon at Swinford Old Manor I had only one trout. My friend had seven splendid fish nearly a pound in weight to lay before the Poet Laureate's delighted gaze. As Captain L——, I had noticed, had been casting down stream and making the fly run up against the current by long pulls, this was a surprise to me, but the explanation, exceedingly instructive, was at hand. 'What fly?' asked our host enthusiastically. 'I do not know its name, but here it is,' answered the fisherman." The lure was a water-cricket. I quite agree with Mr. Hodgson that his friend's success with a fly which produced a drag on the water, and such a drag, was exceedingly instructive,

but I fear that his interpretation of the facts and mine will not be found to correspond.

The use of the microscope in fly-dressing is a refinement of the art which borders on the farcical and affords the scorner an opportunity he is unlikely to neglect.



It is one of the absurd vagaries of the dry-fly artist which, if they add nothing to the gaiety of nations, tend to the promotion of hilarity among his less divertingly imaginative fellow-craftsmen. In failing to bestow on him that greatest of all gifts, the gift of humour, Nature has been thoughtless of his interests. He takes himself and his vocation much too seriously.

The votary of the dry-fly probably derives a greater pleasure from his art than the wet-fly fisher finds in his. In promiscuous casting, the angler has a general expectation of a rise. He is aware that at any moment his fly may be taken by a fish, but the precise moment is not within his knowledge. Even when his lure is passing over the most promising of water his hope is far removed from certainty. He is continuously on the alert, but while he is interested in every cast he has no particular interest in any. The dry-fly angler, on the contrary, does not

LOCH LOMOND.

fish at large; he bides his time, and casts only to rising fish. He has no vague hope that his fly may fall in the neighbourhood of an expectant trout; he knows that it will. He anticipates a rise, not at any, but at every cast, and while he is actually engaged in fishing, his interest is maintained at its liveliest. His pleasure is intensified by concentration. In wet-fly fishing there is no excitement until a fish has risen; in dry-fly fishing the excitement begins with the cast, rises gradually as the fly approaches the spot at which the fish may be expected to appear, and culminates in a paroxysm of delight when the water breaks, the lure vanishes, and the line suddenly becomes taut; or flickers out like a spent candle as soon as it is obvious that the advances of the angler have been unfavourably received. I must not, however, be taken too literally. The wet-fly fisher has also his opportunities of casting over rising fish, and his interest is then much keener than when casting on chance, and in hope rather than in expectation; but the circumstances are not quite the same, and the difference is in favour of the dry-fly angler; his fly is on the surface and within sight.

We dearly love a sensation. The spectacle of a hawk in pursuit of a small bird or of an unhappy hare coursed by the hounds has for us an intense, if horrible,

attraction, and, though we dare not confess it, we are conscious of disappointment, we feel as if we had been cheated of the most thrilling incident in the drama, when the hawk fails in his swoop and the hare successfully eludes the hounds. Even minor tragedies are not without interest for us; we eagerly follow the course of an insect along the surface of the water, and calculate its chances of escaping the observation of the fish beneath, and when it succeeds in reaching the shelter of the bank, we heave a sigh which is not always that of satisfaction. In the fascination of the chase lies the secret of the pleasure with which the angler gloats over the floating fly and anticipates the moment which decides its fate.

The essential feature of dry-fly fishing is, as the name implies, the employment of a dry or floating fly. Whether a submerged fly fished as skilfully and with the same extraordinary care would not, even on the English chalk-stream, achieve results as satisfactory, is, perhaps, not beyond a reasonable doubt. The practised dry-fly fisher is certain that it would not, and he speaks, presumably, from experience of both systems. I am,

to my sorrow, entirely ignorant of the highly-cultured fish that swim the Hampshire rivers and, lest I be accused of harbouring an unjust frame of mind, refrain from expressing an opinion on the subject. Of our northern waters, however, I am not without some little knowledge, and on them I have never seen occasion to resort to the use of the dry-fly ; I have found the trout, if inclined to accept anything at all, quite prepared to take a lure beneath the surface. That, to be sure, does not seem to be the universal experience. I have read of an angler who is satisfied that on the occasion he describes his creel would have been empty but for the employment of the dry-fly. One is curious to learn how he knows. Since he does not appear to have given the trout an opportunity of considering the wet-fly, one wonders by what process of reasoning he persuades himself that it would not have proved as enticing as the other. I have rarely had any difficulty, especially in the evening, in securing sport by lightly casting my fly into or above the ring made by a rising fish and permitting it to sink. When, in these circumstances, the wet-fly was taken at all, it was taken so readily that the dry-fly offered no advantages. My efforts, it is true, were not always suitably rewarded. Sometimes it happened that, in their inexplicable

caprice, the fish stubbornly refused to regard the flies I offered them, and it is possible that if on these occasions I had retained my flies on the surface, I might have found them more alluring. I have, however, no assurance of the fact, and my impression is that the situation of the lure was not the cause of its rejection.

The dry-fly system seems the result of an attempt to place fly-fishing on a scientific basis. The effort is praiseworthy, but that it is foredoomed to failure goes without saying; the uncertain humour of the trout, a factor not to be ignored, must ever defy calculation. The claim made on behalf of dry-fly fishing that it affords the only means by which, on waters and in circumstances suited to it, trout can be secured, is not generally admitted. Be its practical value what it may, however, it is conceived on a principle which appeals to one's reason, and has the merit of being more or less logical. It has been carefully thought out, and it brings us a step nearer to the angler's aim: a perfect imitation of nature, not only in the colour of the lure, but in the manner in which it is presented to the fish. In essaying the capture of surface-feeding trout, the dry-fly angler

seeks to imitate the fly on the water as closely as human skill and the gross material at his disposal will permit; and he endeavours so to manœuvre his lure that its movements may conform to those of the insect it simulates. He copies nature in every detail, and provides the artificial with all the organs—if in abnormal number—with which the natural fly is furnished. Since the natural fly, in its final metamorphosis, is possessed of wings, these form part of the artificial also. If genius be, indeed, an infinite capacity for taking pains, the dry-fly fisher may claim its possession. He neglects nothing likely to further his purpose, and is disappointed if his counterfeit, as it rides lightly on the stream, is to be distinguished—at a distance—from the natural flies which bear it company on its way.

He, however, does not confine himself to the floating fly; when it is contra-indicated by circumstances, he has no hesitation in adopting, with a difference, the methods of the wet-fly fisher, and angling with a submerged lure. He is aware that when the trout are "tailing," or "bulging," the dry-fly is passed over them in vain, and that if he desires to take fish it is necessary to change his tactics. He discards his winged fly and arms his cast with a hackle, which he permits to sink. The fish are feeding on the nymphæ of flies rising

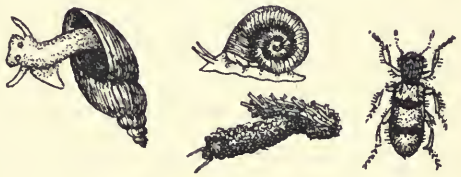
through the water, or on a variety of small organisms on the bottom or among the weeds, and as these—the organisms, not the weeds—are without wings, or have their wings folded away out of sight, the angler, in his desire for scientific accuracy, omits such organs from the dressing of the lure. He argues that, since the objects engaging the attention of the trout are wingless, the presence of wings on the artificial fly tends to arouse their suspicion and alarm. But the practice is not universal. There are some members of the dry-fly school who do not find the fearful and suspicions trout dismayed by the apparition of a winged insect in their midst. The Marquess of Granby confesses to a preference for the Alder when fishing for tailing trout. According to custom, he casts down stream and works his fly upwards against the current. Now, the Alder is a fly that is never on the water of its own will, and since the fish can never have seen it in the situation in which they find its image, deeply submerged, hanging in the stream, or strenuously forcing its way against it, the sceptic is tempted to enquire, "What of the faithful imitation of nature theory?" The statement—of the poet—that "Nature best followed best secures the sport," appears, on the face of it, so obvious that it might almost be

called a truism. There is underlying it, however, a fallacy which seriously vitiates the reasoning; it assumes that the trout possesses an acuteness of perception and a depth of cunning which render his deception all but impossible. The assumption is contradicted by the experience of the dry-fly fisherman himself. For what do the trout mistake the artificial Alder? If they are the closely observant, acutely reasoning fish they are supposed to be, they cannot take it for the original, for they find it in a situation in which the presence of the natural fly would be quite phenomenal, and displaying a vigour and energy of which no winged insect is capable. Is it inconceivable that they should accept it merely because it bears a general resemblance to the objects on which they habitually subsist?

If the dry-fly fisher is sometimes, his wet-fly brother —if one dare suggest the relationship—is habitually, inconsistent. He takes pains to dress his lures in the likeness of natural insects, and then, without misgiving, presents them to the fish under unnatural conditions. He flatters nature on the one hand and on the other flouts her. He follows her in this direction, and in that pursues a course opposed to all her teaching. The fly he seeks to simulate rides jauntily on the water, the

plaything of the current and the wind ; its image, except when the angler is fishing straight up stream, exhibits an inherent power of locomotion which should challenge the attention of the least observant trout, and lead to its immediate rejection. It is possible that, as suggested, the sunken fly drifting inertly with the stream, is taken for a "drowned fly," but the possibility appears remote, since a body so light and buoyant rarely fails to maintain its position on the surface ; only in turbulent water is it likely to become submerged, and then but temporarily. Be that as it may, however, the suggestion does not help us much ; it affords no explanation whatever of the success of a lure crossing the stream, or cleaving its way against it, or actively traversing the still waters of the loch. The ingenious angler must devise a more comprehensive theory ; one which embraces all the conditions under which the trout accepts a particular fly. The statement that in a situation in which it appears inert and dead he takes it for a fly which has succumbed to the water, does not explain what it represents to him when he finds it displaying all the activity of life.

The fly, properly so called, is little more than a *bonne bouche* to the trout; it forms but a trifling percentage of his fare. Were he dependent for his livelihood on the scraps he gathers from the surface, he would never have acquired his name for lustiness. He finds his living not on, but in, the water, and the greater portion of his food consists of the larvæ and the nymphæ of a wide variety of insects belonging to many species, genera, and orders; of beetles and molluscs and small crustaceans; of minnows and other fish; of, in short, everything edible—even snakes—and within the compass of his gullet. If the submerged fly suggests to him anything specific, it is one of the aquatic forms of life on which he habitually feeds. These, at least, are the objects he is accustomed to see in the situation occupied by the angler's artifice, and it is these the wet-fly fisherman should seek to simulate. If he would be faithful in his adherence to nature's methods, he should discard his winged flies and confine himself exclusively to the use of hackles. The hackle may not provide him with a "living image" of any of the minute creatures



which constitute the staple diet of the trout, but it is a much closer approximation to the truth than he is likely to find in the lure dressed with superfluous organs of flight. It may, too, without doing violence to the angler's reason, or insulting the intelligence of the trout, be fished at any depth; near the bottom, towards the surface, or midway between.

Some time ago, desirous of trying a small experiment, I fished during an entire week with hackles alone. The experiment was conducted on a loch, and I fished in the usual way, permitting my flies to rest a moment in the water, and then drawing them slowly towards me. They were always an inch or two beneath the surface. The result more than justified my expectations. The conditions were unfavourable—or fish were few—and sport was poor, but I succeeded in taking twice the number of trout killed by any other angler on the water. The incident does not, of course, afford conclusive evidence of the superiority of the hackle, but it proves beyond a doubt that the efficacy of the fly is in no way impaired by the absence of wings. I certainly do not ascribe my comparative success, great as it was, to the use of the lures I employed; I am satisfied, indeed, that I should have taken almost, if not quite, as many fish with those in general use. To the fish

that will take the artificial fly at all, the presence or absence of wings must be a matter of supreme indifference. Many things contribute to the filling of the creel besides the fly; it cannot be dispensed with, but it is by no means the most important factor in the fisherman's results. I have fished within a few yards of a friend who, although his flies were exactly the same as my own, took trout after trout, while I scarcely obtained a rise.

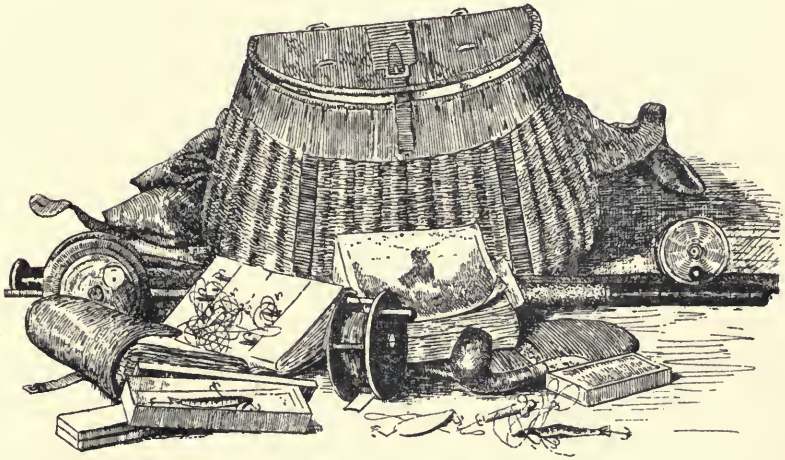
Stewart gave to the hackle, as a means of capturing trout, a higher rank than that accorded to the winged fly, and Mr. E. M. Tod, in *Wet-Fly Fishing*, says of it that it is proverbially valuable for the fishing of "waters." Why it should prove a more profitable lure on a "water" than on a "river," or a "burn," Mr. Tod does not inform us, and he has probably an excellent reason for his reticence. The insect or the spider which the hackle may be supposed to represent is surely not confined to streams of a particular size, and since the distinctive feature of a "water" is not the possession of a characteristic fauna, we can hardly believe that the trout it holds have developed a peculiar palate.

The angler is the least logical of men. He has never heard of Whately, and opinions aired on one page, we find him flatly contradicting on the next.

One is tempted to suspect him of repeating phrases, not because his reason has consented to the thought expressed in them, but because, having been so frequently employed by others, they are not to be omitted with propriety. I have just been reading an invaluable little text-book for the use of students of the gentle art, the author of which, after assuring us that we must copy nature in the most minute detail, affirms, with curious inconsistency, that while the winged fly is "decidedly the closer imitation of the natural insect," the hackle is "out and out the most *(sic)* deadly."

There may be, somewhere, trout so preternaturally sharp that they refuse an artificial fly, because in some trivial detail of colour it differs slightly from its prototype, but it has never been my privilege to meet with them. The fish, in the pursuit of which I have spent my leisure, were much less exacting; they did not demand a lure dressed, even approximately, in the likeness of "the fly on the water or due to be there;" so indiscriminating were they and so simple, that they willingly accepted any lure that did not too obviously betray its artificiality. And their confidence was easily secured; they succumbed as readily to the rude, imperfect efforts of my own unskilful fingers as to the most

cunningly constructed triumphs of the tier's art. It has not been my experience that imitation of a specific object is essential to success; it seems to me sufficient that the artificial fly should be so like a thing of life that the trout are deceived into believing it to be one.



CHAPTER III

STREAM-FISHING

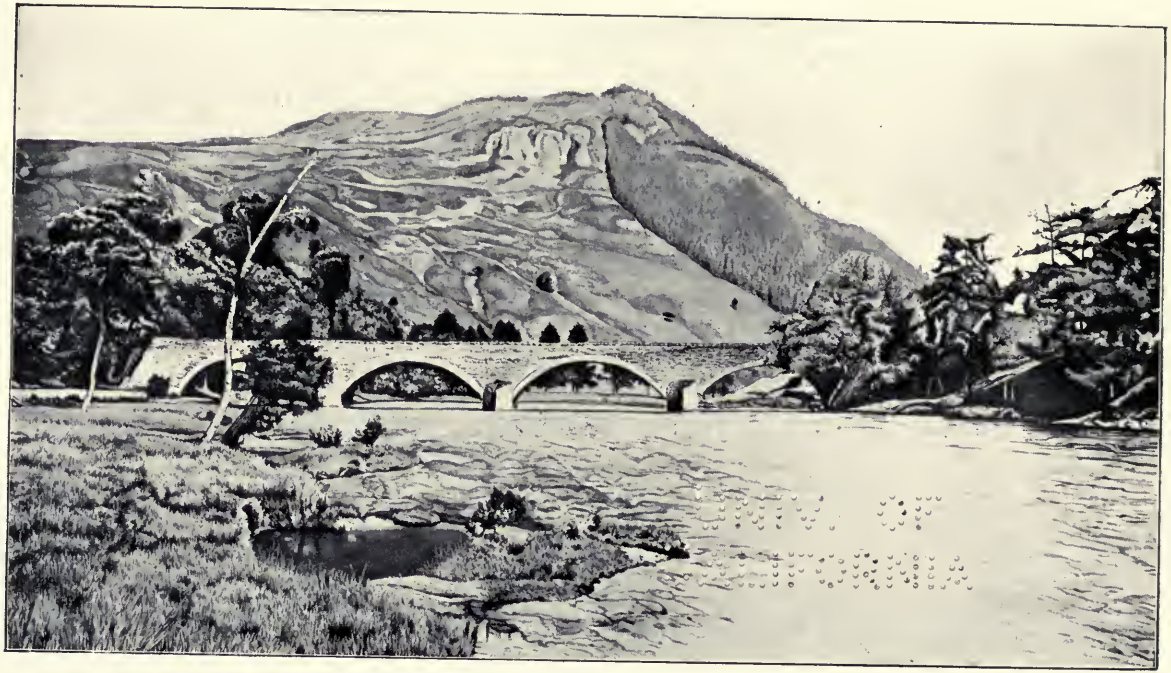
IN the infinite variety of the stream lies much of its charm for the angler. He finds in its alternation of deep, still pool and noisy, rippling shallow, of whirling eddy and bright, sparkling run, a diversity of water which adds greatly to his interest in the sport. He does not throw his flies promiscuously on chance. While he neglects no portion of the water in which fish may lie, he gives careful and minute attention to the places where, his knowledge of their habits tells him, they are most likely to be found. He adapts his methods to constantly changing conditions. The varying circumstances in which his casts are made involve a variation in his style of casting and afford him frequent opportunities for the display of special skill. Now cast with

artfully contrived up-stream curve on the line, his fly circles with the eddy beneath the opposite bank; now it falls, light as a feather, behind the great stone where the stream, parted for a moment, comes together again; now it is thrown deftly to the very spot desired, under the overhanging bushes in whose shadow the expectant trout lie in wait for the flies which fall from above. On the changeful stream the angler is ever encountering something new; some new problem to be solved, some new difficulty to be overcome. His ingenuity and fertility of resource are in frequent request, and, should they prove equal to the demands made on them, he is amply rewarded: he has not only the joy of taking fish; he has the pleasing satisfaction derived from the consciousness of knowledge intelligently applied and of skill exercised successfully.

The angler should fish up stream. The advantages of casting in that direction are obvious, and they have been impressed on us with such frequent iteration, that it is hard to believe in the continued existence of an adherent of the earlier method. The conversion of the angler, especially the angler south of the Tweed, seems to have been slow, but it must be now complete; it is impossible that he can retain a vestige of his ancient faith. The old order passed with Captain St.

John Dick, the last, so far as I know, to make a stand in its defence. If there still remain any who ignore the doctrines first clearly enunciated by Stewart—though not first practised by him—it is not from conviction, but from indolence. They are probably well aware of the advantages of up-stream fishing, but they know also that it makes large demands on the angler's energies and they prefer a small basket easily gained to a full one earned by strenuous labour. The modern down-stream fisher is no enthusiast; he is content with a moderate success; while willing enough to capture fish, he is unwilling to spend himself in their pursuit. Up-stream fishing, it is also said, requires a more accurate and extensive acquaintance with the habits of the trout than the down-stream angler need possess. But they who say so do not condescend to tell us why. To one not in the secret it seems that whether the angler fish in one direction or the other he should, if he desires to take fish, know where to look for them.

It is enough to establish the superiority of up-stream fishing in clear water that, since the trout habitually lie with their head towards the source and are extremely quick of sight, it is impossible to approach them from above unseen. They are the most timid of fish and so



KINLOCH—RANNOCH.

ready to flee at the first glimpse of a figure on the bank that, except in broken or discoloured water, the down-stream fisher is wasteful of energy; they have seen him and fled while he was still a score of yards away.

Even when seeking to reach them from below, the angler is constrained to exercise the greatest caution. He dare not walk boldly up on them, trusting that the disposition of their heads will prevent them from detecting his approach. If he does he will find his confidence betrayed, and all he will see of them is their shadowy forms as they glide swiftly away out of sight. He cannot entirely efface himself, but he must carefully avoid all unnecessary exposure of his offensive person. He should learn from the dry-fly fisher, who probably owes his success as much to the skill with which he stalks his quarry as to the use of the lure he affects. In fishing from a high bank especially the angler should take advantage of every bit of cover likely to aid him in concealing his presence. Where no cover affords him a sufficient screen he should, regardless of comfort, creep and crawl towards the water; even in the attitude of the serpent, should that be necessary to his perfect obscuration.

Possibly he may think the game not worth the candle. That is, of course, his own concern, but he is a lukewarm angler if he can contemplate with placid mind the wave created by a great trout speeding in fear of him towards the sanctuary of the depths.

Raised banks should, if possible, be shunned. When circumstances permit, the angler should fish from the level of the stream or, still better, from the bed of the stream itself; he should wade. While in the water he is an inconspicuous feature of the landscape, and nowhere else is he so likely to escape the observation of the keen-eyed trout. Wading, too, gives him command of a greater extent of water and enables him to secure all the advantages of a short line.

In wading an unknown water the angler should proceed with the utmost care. Especially in fishing down is it imperative that his attention should not be wholly devoted to the trout; his situation claims a part in it. It is so easy to move forward with the stream that, in his preoccupation, he may wander on unconscious of the risk he runs until suddenly startled to an unpleasant sense of danger. He will be happy—comparatively, at least—if he recognises the peril while there is yet time to avert it, but he may have a few bad moments before he regains the bank and feels free

to breathe again. His thoughts will be far from cheerful as, a yawning gulf below him, he braces himself against the current and, with the help of his landing-net or the butt of his rod, feels his way foot by foot towards a place of safety. Those who have once occupied the alarming position are unlikely ever to forget the trepidation in which they contemplated the prospect before them.

When, in down-stream fishing, the angler hooks a fish of any size, he is compelled to get below it and play it with the assistance of the stream, thus not only sacrificing time and adding to the chances of the trout's escape, but needlessly disturbing the water on which he has yet to cast a fly. How much simpler and more favourable his position if he is already below his quarry when it takes the lure.

But how far the disturbance of the water affects the interests of the angler is uncertain. It is likely enough that a trout, as he darts hither and thither in his frenzied efforts to regain his freedom, raises a commotion among the others in his neighbourhood; that his excitement is "catching" need not occasion us surprise. It is, however, the teaching of experience that the contagion is frequently escaped. It is not uncommon to secure a second fish while the first is still in play, and we know

that the flies on the otter are seized by trout after trout, though those already hooked are plunging and struggling on the line. The trout is incapable of profiting by the misfortunes of his fellows; is, indeed, incapable of realizing that they are in misfortune. His emotions at sight of others in distress are vague, formless, indefinite. They are not based on intelligent appreciation of the situation; they are purely reflex. His fear, if he has any, is not the fear of a known peril; it is without a recognised cause; it is the same unreasoning panic which sometimes seizes man himself and sends him fleeing in terror from a danger he would find it impossible to name. Whatever its source, however, the excitement of the trout will probably divert him from thoughts of food, and the angler is wise to preserve the tranquillity of the water in front of him.

It is generally believed that when the angler is fishing up-stream he is more likely to hook the trout that rise to him than when fishing in the opposite direction. The belief is based on the assumption that the up-stream angler strikes towards the trout, while the down-stream angler strikes away from it. If it be true, as is commonly supposed, that when the rise to the submerged fly is seen, the trout has already secured the fly or missed it and has turned to go down again, the

assumption seems scarcely justified. Since in up-stream fishing the trout approaches the fly from below—that is, from down stream—or from the side, and having taken it or failed to take it, returns whence he came, it is as likely as not that when the angler strikes, the head of the fish is towards him. He really knows nothing of the direction in which it is disposed and therefore cannot tell how, as regards it, the strike takes effect. So far as it concerns the down-stream fisher, the assumption probably contains an element of reason. In the circumstances in which the fly is presented to him, the fish makes his presence felt before he turns in his descent, and as he seizes the lure from behind, it must occasionally be snatched away from him ere it is well within his lips. As, however, the angler has no slack line to recover and the act of striking is immediately effective, he possibly secures an average number of the fish he raises. But it is all the merest conjecture. We are without data on which to base a reasonable judgment. I am not aware that any angler has compiled statistics affording a comparison between the rival systems. My own experience, so far as, in the absence of records, it may be relied on, is that the proportion of fish missed to those hooked is no greater in down-stream fishing than in fishing up.

According to Stewart, one great advantage of up-stream fishing is, "that by it the angler can much better adapt the motions of his flies to those of the natural insects." Stewart's knowledge of Entomology does not seem to have been very profound — he writes, for example, of the Phryganea or Stone Fly of naturalists—and with all his practical experience of angling, he apparently knew but little of the nature of the fare on which the trout subsists. And what knowledge he did possess does not seem to have had much influence on his opinions. Of the wealth and variety of insect life beneath the surface he may have had some conception, but all his theories of fly-fishing appear to have had their origin in the belief that the flies which provide the trout with his surface food reach the water from without. The moment at which the artificial fly alights is, he frequently repeats, the most deadly of the cast ; or, as it is put by a disciple whose little book sparkles with similar gems of English, "The alighting of the fly is the most deadly of the cast." Although his lack of information did not impair

his success as a practical angler it sometimes led him to erroneous conclusions.

"For the angler," he writes, "to attempt by any motion of his hand to give to his flies a living appearance is mere absurdity." "We must," he elsewhere contends, "suppose that the fish takes the artificial fly for a dead one or one that has fairly got into the stream and has lost all power of resistance. A feeble motion of the wings is the only attempt which a fly in such a case could make. What, then, must be the astonishment of the trout when they see a tiny insect which they are accustomed to seize as it is carried towards them, crossing the stream with the strength and agility of the otter?" He admits that the angler drawing his flies up and across stream does take fish, and "this," he maintains, "is the strongest evidence that the trout are not the profound philosophers the notions of some would have us suppose." No profound philosopher, he reasons, would take, for a real fly, the artificial fly battling successfully against the stream; but the trout takes it for a real fly; therefore the trout is no profound philosopher. We may accept

his conclusion while denying the soundness of his minor premise. We are not, as he declares, compelled to suppose that the trout takes the artificial for a real fly; he may take it for a beetle, for a corixa, for a small crustacean, for one of the many things inhabiting the water; he may, as has already been suggested, take it merely because it seems a thing of life and therefore edible. Even admitting the truth of Stewart's assumption — an assumption shared by so many of us — that the artifice is taken for a fly, does the trout perceive a dismaying breach of nature's order in the spectacle it presents as it lightly and easily surmounts a stream against which he himself maintains his position with difficulty? I do not think so. He may or may not take the lure. If he does not, it is because he *sees* that it is not a natural object, or because, while unsuspectingly assuming its reality, it is not to his taste or he has no desire for food. It is not because he has carefully pondered the phenomenon — he has never heard the word and knows nothing of the thing it signifies — and arrived at the reasoned conclusion that, since the object of his scrutiny is accomplishing a feat beyond the capacity of any earthly insect, it must

be something else. His knowledge is direct; is not based on observation and reflection. If his eye does not inform him, his reason can not. The trout is not the sharp, observant, acutely reasoning fish he is popularly supposed to be. He does not habitually discuss with himself the nature of the lure and refuse it when, after a long and complex process of thought, he has decided what it is not; what it *is* must remain for ever beyond his ken.

Yet, if we may believe what is written of him, he possesses an intellect similar to and rivalling that of man himself. A recent writer on angling tells us that, with a particular fly, he on one occasion succeeded in taking trout that had for long withstood the seductions of all other lures, and in explanation of his success he maintains that though the fly—a Sand Fly—was not in season, the fish knew that it was due and were awaiting it. He demands too much of our credulity. The trout may welcome a fly when it arrives, but that they are aware of the date on which it may be expected to appear, and look forward with pleasure to its coming, is beyond belief.

It is equally difficult to accept the assertion we owe to another writer, that the trout knows when he is being fished for. If he is so phenomenally astute as to be

cognizant of the intentions of the figure on the bank, why does he flee from it in panic to his lair among the roots of the ancient alder, or under the great stone in the centre of the stream? Why does he not calmly maintain his position and, with tongue in cheek, smile at the angler's futile efforts to entice him? Since he knows that he is being fished for, it is surprising that he does not know how to avoid being caught, except by running away. To a fish of his gifts it should be obvious that there is no cause for alarm; while he refrains from interfering with the fly which he knows to be artificial, and part of the engine designed for his undoing, the angler is powerless to harm him. It is impossible that the writer referred to can realize all that his words imply.

The intelligence of the trout is amazing; chiefly, perhaps, by reason of its curious inequalities. He is so sharp that he detects the most trifling discrepancy between the colour scheme of the angler's lure and that of the insect it represents, and so dull that he perceives nothing unusual in that obtrusive and unnatural feature of the fly—the hook; so quickly observant that he

rejects a fly because its legs, otherwise of the approved tone of blue, are without amber extremities, and so obtuse that he fails to see that these same legs, which should be but six in number, are as the sand on the sea-shore for multitude, and in their anatomy convey no suggestion of the real. He is a strange blend of stupidity and genius. Happily, he does not deserve his reputation; if he did, man's ingenuity would be applied in vain to the discovery of a means of circumventing him. In reality, his mind is but poorly furnished, and he seems to learn little from experience. Impressions are quickly effaced from his memory, and incidents forgotten as soon as past. Instances of his dulness of apprehension might be quoted by the score. The fact is, that we read ourselves into the trout and ascribe to him thoughts and motives similar to our own. We forget that he is but a fish and that his intelligence is commensurate with the organisation of his brain.

But if he is not the intellectual prodigy of the angler's imagination he is quick-eyed, shy, fearful and nervous, and his capture is not to be carelessly or thoughtlessly essayed. Now and then, however, we have cause to wonder if in the thought expended on the

devices by which we endeavour to outwit him, there is not involved much misdirected energy. Fishing, one day, from the banks of a little brook, I was overtaken by another fisherman who had come up the water behind me. As anglers do, we fell into conversation, and on comparing notes, I found that his basket held more and larger fish than mine. I had been employing all the art I knew, fishing fine and far—but not too far—off and with flies so small and beautifully made that even the craftiest of trout might have been excused for confiding in the fraud, and curious to learn the secret of his greater success, I asked permission to inspect his tackle. The request was willingly complied with, and, to the utter confusion of all my notions of the fitness of things angling, I was shown a cast consisting of a few feet of the coarsest gut, tied at short intervals in great, clumsy knots—it resembled a rosary rather than anything else—and terminating in a fly (No. 8 or 9, new scale) composed of a tuft of human hair and the extremity of a blade of grass roughly bound to the hook with a piece of white cotton thread. The monstrosity was made in the image of nothing on earth or, within my knowledge, elsewhere, and for what it had been taken was beyond the hazard of a guess. That it had been taken at all gave me food for thought.

The angler is not always free to choose the direction in which he will fish; it is sometimes determined for him by the wind. When that is adverse to up-stream fishing, he must perforce fish down. Occasionally he may be able to effect a compromise and fish up and across, but when the wind blows violently down stream he must bow to the conditions it imposes—or refrain from fishing, If the water pursue a winding course he will probably find an occasional stretch on which the wind is favourable to up-stream fishing, and in that case it has been suggested that he should confine himself "to such bends or reaches which (*sic*) are negotiable." He will be unwise if he does, unless, which is unlikely, these suffice to keep him in occupation during the entire day. By all means let him fish up, where the wind is accommodating enough to permit him, but he will be foolish to neglect the intervening water and sacrifice his sport to an idea. Even when he is given a choice, there are conditions under which he may, without hesitation, fish down; conditions, indeed, under which a too rigid adherence to what has, with ridiculous inaptitude, been called *good form*, will render unavailing his purpose on the stream. When the water is high and discoloured, there is no reason in the world why he should exhaust himself by labouring against it. If, even in such cir-

cumstances, he should elect to fish up stream he will, as, in one of the most delightful of all books on angling, Sir Edward Gray assures him, have the satisfaction of feeling that he has chosen the more difficult part—and that is, possibly, the only satisfaction he will have. There is no particular virtue in making a martyr of one's self by toiling arduously along a rough and stony path when close by and leading to the same goal there runs another, smooth and pleasant to the feet.

Since it prevents the trout from detecting the presence of the angler, and enables him to approach them as closely as he desires, the opacity of the stream removes the most important of the reasons in favour of fishing up. Curiously enough, too, Stewart's final objection to fishing down seems to lose its validity when the water is discoloured and is running high. Why, is not apparent. If the objection has any weight at all, it is surely peculiarly weighty in the very circumstances in which we are advised that we may safely disregard it. If a fly successfully opposing a low, slow-gliding stream is to the trout an object of alarm, how terrifying should it prove when he sees it cleaving its way against a stream increased in volume and flowing with augmented velocity and force.

After dark, too, the angler may, without a qualm,

cast down stream and drag his flies upward against the current. By night the trout sees nothing surprising in a spectacle that by day inevitably rouses his lightly sleeping fears; or is it that between sunset and dawn a fly achieves, without effort, a feat of which, during the remaining hours of the twenty-four, it is altogether incapable?

It is also permissible to fish down rough, broken, quickly running water; usually, indeed, it is impossible to fish such water in any other way.

Many years ago I was in the habit of fishing a little stream to the creation of which nature had contributed but small assistance. It owes its being to the hands of man. Its mission is strictly utilitarian, and it seems to know it. There is an air of business about it, a hint of an object in front, it is pressing to attain. It hurries swirling and eddying along as if conscious that life is earnest and time too precious to be thrown away. For it, is no loitering by the way to toy with sweet forget-me-nots or play among the cresses; it is informed by a steady purpose from which nothing diverts it. It neither chatters over stony ways nor babbles on the pebbles; it pursues a reserved and silent course. It is no frivolous, irresponsible brook laughing and leaping without a care, without a thought

of what lies before it, onwards to the sea. Its mood is grave and serious, as befits its place in the service of man. It is not an object of much beauty, but, though æsthetic considerations did not influence those who shaped its course, it sweeps in graceful curves around the hill, and even its obtrusive artificiality cannot rob it entirely of the charm inherent in running water.

I have spent many hours on its banks, though to little profit. It holds but few trout, since, because of its uniformly rapid flow, there are few places in which they can find rest. For the same reason, it is impossible to fish it up; the angler's flies are swept past him in a heap almost as soon as they have touched the water. There is no angler capable of casting with the frequency its velocity exacts. It is not merely that the muscular energy involved soon becomes exhausting, but that cast must follow cast in such quick succession that our limited capacity is quite unequal to the task. Only by the adoption of the ingenious method devised by the author of *The W——l T——t* is it possible to make a basket on it. It seems to be the playful custom of the writer of that amazing book to count among his captures the fish he fails to catch. "One day in 1898," he writes, "we got thirteen trout, of which six were foul-hooked and many others pricked, light-hooked, and lost."

IN SPATE.

When the angler is compelled to fish down stream he should cast obliquely across the water, and permit the current to carry his flies round to the side on which he is placed. His lures will not be perfectly successful imitations of insects caught in the stream and deprived of all power of voluntary motion, but they will probably prove just as alluring as if they were. When he has discovered what it is, he may find worthy of his consideration the plan so artfully concealed in the following cryptic words:—"Good fishing may be had by standing well back from the river verge or well back from the lip of a steep bank and casting opposite your feet, with three flies, and let them float down close under your own bank, casting rapidly and rarely allowing your flies to get below your stand-point."

Should the angler who has conscientious objections to dragging his fly against the current, or shrinks from the awful charge of failing to observe good form, desire to fish a sharp run immediately below him, he must cast short and, dropping the point of his rod, confide his line entirely to the water. If he acts with skill and is careful that the speed at, and the direction in, which his lure is travelling correspond exactly to those of a natural fly similarly situated, he need not fear that the suspicious trout will detect its unreality.

Trout eagerly awaiting the descent of food are often to be seen in numbers poised in the water at the pool-foot. In the absence of wind, however, the unaccomplished angler need not seek them there; since it requires skilful fishing to induce a rise in water smooth of surface, the artist alone is likely to succeed. The tyro should confine himself to broken water; water which will aid him in dissembling the fictitious nature of his lure, and in which his lack of science may possibly elude the observation of the trout. That, he will meet with towards the upper end of the pool. He should, from choice, fish from the shallow side of the stream, and before directing his attention to the farther bank may, with advantage, make a tentative, up-stream cast or two near that he occupies. In casting across the stream he should throw his fly obliquely upwards, the angle at which his first cast is made depending, of course, on the breadth of the pool. When the current has borne his flies a short distance down stream, he must recover his line and cast again a few feet higher up. In a series of casts he should describe the arc of a circle, beginning at the far bank and ending near that on which he is standing; but I am not prepared to say that his creel will be appreciably lighter should he reverse the process and, starting from the near bank,

finish in the neighbourhood of that opposite. Unless he is raising and missing fish he need not cast twice in the same place ; if the trout are inclined for food they will seize his flies at once, and if they are not, they will observe their passing unconcernedly. Having exhausted the water within his reach, he will take a step forward and go through the process anew. Casting methodically, he should move slowly up the pool exhibiting his flies, so far as he can, to every fish within it. While he may, perhaps, anticipate most sport close to the banks, he must not neglect the main current, and, as on the loch, he should give careful attention to the outer edge of the shallows.

Streams should be dealt with in a similar manner. In fishing a swift run, however, the angler is compelled to cast with greater frequency than on the relatively slow-flowing water of the pool, and as the rapid descent of his flies may prevent their presence from being instantly detected he may, until satisfied of their futility, repeat his efforts to attract the notice of his quarry. When casting towards the opposite bank, he may occasionally have some difficulty in retaining his flies on the spot he desires to search ; the intervening stream, pulling on the line, tends to drag them quickly away. But the exercise of a little ingenuity will generally

enable him to achieve his aim. By holding his rod well up, he may so contrive his cast that the gut alone falls on the water—beyond the obstacle to his success—or he may cast with an up-stream curve on the line; since the line communicates no movement to the flies until the curve has been straightened out by the action of the current, he may find it possible to keep them in position as long as he considers necessary. These, at least, are the devices we are recommended to adopt, and their efficacy is not to be denied, but their successful execution implies a perfection in the art of casting which one of us is far from having reached. Not every angler profits by the opportunities for learning with which the practice of his art provides him, and to many the easiest way of dealing with a difficulty is to pass it by.

The angler should fish with care every spot in which the trout are likely to seek harbour; and these spots, if he has any faculty of observation, his experience will soon enable him to recognise. In the shadow of every overhanging bush, beneath every hollow bank—especially a bank towards which the current sets—under every stone large enough to afford concealment, lurk trout waiting expectantly on the bounty of the stream. Though, like the poet, the angler may be born, he requires much

making, and the instinctive knowledge with which he is equipped at birth does not include a knowledge of the habits of the trout; that, he acquires in later life by earnest study of the object of his quest. He must not, therefore, approach the stream under the erroneous impression that nature has furnished him with an innate fount of information which raises him above the necessity for thought and renders superfluous the exercise of reason. The truths on familiarity with which he builds his hope of success are not of the variety we call self-evident and which we apprehend by immediate perception. They are not to be known by intuition.

When fishing a stretch of water flowing sluggishly over a bottom bare of cover, the angler should confine his attention to the neighbourhood of the banks. Except in the evening, or when the trout are obviously abroad in search of food, the centre of the stream will prove quite unproductive. Even when its surface is fretted by the wind he may, without loss, pass it untried.

At the beginning of the season the trout are still in occupation of the pools. They do not emerge from their retirement until the restoration of the vigour sacrificed to the maintenance of the race, or lost during the enforced abstinence of winter enables them to withstand the streams. Before the end of April, however,

they have acquired energy enough to maintain their position in all but the strongest of currents and may be found in numbers even where the water, rushing impetuously over and among the boulders, threatens to sweep them away.

The water is in good condition for fly-fishing when there has been just sufficient rain to produce a slight addition to its volume and diminish its crystalline transparency or when, after a flood, it is beginning to subside and is becoming clear again. Which of these conditions is the better, I do not know, but I am disposed to give my preference to the former ; the rising water stimulates the appetite of the fish and excites in them the expectation of the means of gratifying it, while a spate leaves them full to repletion and disinclined to feed until, in the course of time, they have recovered from the surfeit. The amber-colour so frequently insisted on does not seem to me a necessary factor in the angler's calculations. Whether a stream assumes that colour or not surely depends on the geology of the bed it occupies, or of the country through which it flows. The trout are undisturbed by a moderate increase in the size of the stream, but a flood drives them from their usual haunts, and they are then to be sought, with but partial success, in quiet back-waters and by the shallow margins

of the pools—in any place, in fact, to which they can withdraw from the overwhelming rush of water.

While stream-fishing may be pursued with profit during April, the angler's basket will be heavier in May than in any other month of the season. With the coming of June the trout develop a fancy for the worm, and thereafter, until August, they regard the fly with unconcern ; an unconcern, however, which they display only by day, since after sundown, and during the hours of darkness, they still rise to the lure with avidity. August brings an improvement in the prospects of the fly-fisher, and September is yet more friendly to him, but as by that time the fish are getting out of condition their capture yields him little satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV

LOCH-FISHING

IVES there an angler who, when he may profitably fish the stream, voluntarily seeks the loch? It is scarcely credible. Not that loch-fishing is an evil; it is only a lesser good. The sacrifice of the greater good, the delight of wandering rod in hand by the river, is part of the penalty we pay for man's first disobedience; by the sweat of our brow we still laboriously earn our bread. Stream-fishing is the privilege of the leisured; in its dependence on the caprice of the weather, it is not for him who only at long intervals enjoys a transient liberty.

Prolonged drought, of which our distressful climate seldom gives us reason to complain, is disastrous to the prospects of the stream-fisher. While it prevails he is

deprived of occupation; of occupation, at least, from which he gains the smallest profit. The sun glows pitilessly in a brazen sky, and day by day the stream dwindles and shrinks until it flows, a mere thread, trickling languidly through a parched and thirsty waste of sand and shingle. Its dry and empty channel runs like an unsightly scar across the face of nature. The hapless angler loiters listlessly on its arid banks, and casts a futile fly into the fast disappearing water. The trout, hurriedly withdrawn to cover, show no interest in his efforts, and his pursuit yields him no pleasure. He longs impatiently for a change, but seeks in vain the promise of a break in the monotonously brilliant sunshine. Hourly he scans the horizon for a sign of rain, but no sign is given him; not a cloud even the size of a man's hand rewards his gaze. He retires at night praying that in the morning his ears may be gladdened by the sound of the rain-drops pattering on the pane, but he awakes to a day as bright and serene as the days that have gone before it. As the end of his holiday approaches, bringing with it no change in the aspect of the sky, hope's gradually paling fires are finally reduced to ashes. He is the sport of Fate. On the last evening of his stay the wind veers to the south and dark clouds, charged with rain, obscure the heavens,

but the sight fails to stimulate his interest ; it comes too late. He knows that the threatening rain will be slow to fall, and that long before it reaches earth he will be back at his desk, or behind his counter, or where else his business takes him, his scanty holiday unprofitably spent, and his tackle laid carefully away until the return of another year gives him an opportunity of bringing it out again and, he hopes, of effacing the memory of his disappointment.

The angler has no assurance of success on the loch, but he is less likely to leave it entirely disappointed. It is certain to yield him some degree of satisfaction. His basket may not be always full, but it will seldom be quite empty. The conditions of his sport are less complex ; neither the height nor the colour of the water need concern him much, and with rain he will cheerfully dispense. Bright sunshine he will probably find conducive to his pleasure, but if he is favoured with sufficient wind to fret the surface of the water, he can demand nothing further of the weather. Wind, however, is the one thing essential to his success ; without

it, except during the evening rise, his labour is labour in vain. Since, fortunately, it is never long absent from our Scottish lochs, he is almost certain to enjoy the benefit of its presence at some period of the day.

The angler on the loch will find the experience acquired on the stream of but little service to him. His skill in casting will certainly stand him in good stead, although he may never be called on for an exhibition of great dexterity, but his knowledge of the habits of the trout will avail him none at all. There is little in the loch, as in the stream, to indicate the chosen haunts of the fish. The blank, expressionless expanse of water betrays no secrets; like a mask it conceals all that lies beneath it, and although he may not cast without hope, there is no cast—except when he essays the capture of a fish he has seen rise—in which his interest is particularly engaged. All are made in precisely similar circumstances and each is almost an exact repetition of the others. They are without individuality. There is a dull monotony in loch-fishing which seriously lowers its value as a source of pleasure to the angler. It lacks the variety, the frequent change, to which stream-fishing owes its charm. If there be a form of angling to which the term "chuck and chance it" may,

with any show of justice, be applied, it is that pursued upon the loch.

But though to the loch-fisher it seems a matter of indifference where he casts, he need not cast carelessly. Since he may expect a trout anywhere he should be prepared to find one everywhere. He should cast methodically, covering every inch of water in front of him, and in his very ignorance of the position of the fish, should be even more alert than on the stream. As every rise is in the nature of a surprise to him, his eye should be continuously on his flies, and his thoughts where his eye is. His attention should never be allowed to stray. If he would miss the opportunity of the day, he has but to divert his mind for a moment from the occupation in which he is engaged; when it has returned to the object from which it should never have been absent, he will find that he has accomplished his desire. A great swirl in the water will advise him of the presence of a fish which, he will have the satisfaction of feeling, might have been his but for his thoughtlessness. The trout seem to possess some occult means of knowing when the angler's wits are wool-gathering, and the frequency with which they seize the occasion suggests some interesting speculations. I know of no better method of inducing a dour and obstinate fish to rise

than to turn one's back on the flies and assume an air of unconcern.

The loch may be fished from the bank or from a boat. When fishing from a boat, the angler is best alone. The statement is made in no spirit of churlishness, but in the interest of the angler himself; of the angler whose object in fishing is to catch fish and who estimates his pleasure not, indeed, by the weight of his creel, but by the frequency with which he is given an opportunity of playing a trout. It may be disregarded by the dilettante, whose purpose on the water is the enjoyment of an agreeable outing to which the quest of the trout is merely incidental. He without sacrifice, with, rather, increase of his happiness, may surround himself with a company limited in numbers only by the capacity of the boat. The enthusiastic angler is no curmudgeon; after dinner, in the smoking-room, when the tension is relaxed, there is no one more sociable, but the day he prefers, like that lone fisher the heron, to spend in solitude. The fellowship of his boatman and an occasional opportunity of shouting, across the wave, a greeting to a

passing friend afford him social intercourse enough. When trout are apathetic and his unrequited industry begins to pall, the presence of a congenial companion may help to dissipate his gloom, but when sport is good he is independent of other entertainment.

Circumstances sometimes compel the angler to share a boat with another, but the arrangement is one that it is always wise to avoid. Little can be said in its favour, and it has many disadvantages. It constrains the angler to regulate his actions by those of his companion, and, however mild in temper, he cannot help feeling and inwardly resenting the restraint it imposes on his liberty. And it necessitates drifting broadside to the wind, a disposition of the boat most unfavourable to success, since it prevents the angler from exhausting the possibilities of the water on which he is fishing. While he is engaged with a fish, the boat pursues her course to leeward, probably passing over many more quite prepared to accept the fly were it placed within the circle of their vision.

It is true that while one angler is manœuvring a trout towards the net, the other is not necessarily debarred from fishing; circumstances may, possibly, permit him to continue casting, but he casts with divided interests, one eye on his companion's movements, the

other on his own flies. Too often, however, he is reduced to enforced idleness, and he frets and fumes at, to his impatience, the needless prolongation of the struggle progressing by his side. Meanwhile, the angler in conflict with the trout, feeling that he is spoiling the pleasure of his comrade, attempts, prematurely, to terminate the strife, and in his haste precipitates a catastrophe. The situation is more or less unpleasant for both.

It is almost impossible that two anglers can occupy the same boat without occasionally interfering with each other's movements, and it is in the very nature of things that they should impair each other's success. The number of fish taken by two anglers never greatly exceeds that taken by one in sole possession of the boat. If each is thoughtful of the other and both are adepts in the art of casting they may succeed in averting trouble, but should one of them in a moment of forgetfulness raise his rod while that of his friend is still up, unpleasantness is certain to ensue. Their lines encounter in the air and there results a tangle, the unravelling of which necessitates the exercise of all the ingenuity and patience they possess. With the usual perversity of things inanimate, the mischance occurs at the most inopportune moment of the day; just as the

trout have begun to rise and the prospects of sport to brighten. Its effects are disastrous. The fish are leaping all around in seeming derision of the plight of the unhappy anglers, but the maze is intricate and hard to follow, and tempers strained to breaking threaten to give way entirely at the irritating delay. The wisdom of the ancient adage in which we are advised to hasten slowly is verified in the experience of the fishermen ; in their impatience their fingers refuse obedience to their wills, and much valuable time slips quickly away into the past before the mischief is repaired. It is rectified at last, however, but just too late ; the fish have disappeared and the water is again empty and still. The anglers have lost an opportunity unlikely to recur, and they resume their occupation in gloomy silence. The pleasure has all gone out of their sport. They continue to cast, but half-heartedly, without interest ; one painfully conscious of offence but aggrieved at the dumbly accusing countenance of his companion ; the other righteously indignant, suppressing with difficulty a wrath he would fain pour out in floods of lurid language. The day, which arose in hope and continued in joy, descends in disappointment and despair. The ties of a life-long friendship have been rent asunder on provocation much less grave.

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AT THE LANDING STAGE.

When the angler is alone he has no conflicting interests to consider, and can give his undivided attention to the occupation of the moment. Unhampered by the fear of marring another's pleasure, he may play his fish at his leisure and in any direction which suits his convenience and, if it must be consulted, theirs. He enjoys unlimited freedom of action; he may go where he pleases; the water—not already occupied by another boat, for he may not queer the pitch of a brother angler by getting in his way—is all before him where to choose, and he may fish it in the manner which seems most likely to provide him with all the delight it is capable of yielding. He will, however, fail in his purpose if he permits the boat to drift broadside down the wind.

It is difficult to imagine a more unsatisfactory method of managing the boat than that universally adopted on our Scottish lochs. Were one in search of a means of minimising the angler's success while permitting him to fish, it would be hard to devise a better. It is sanctioned by custom and tradition, but has nothing else to recommend it—except to the boatman. It certainly covers the water, but so imperfectly that much of it is left untried, and many fish quite ready to accept the lure are denied a chance of seeing it. Should a trout

be raised and missed, the boat is over it before the angler has time to repeat his cast, or so near it that, should it again approach the fly, the probability of hooking it is quite infinitesimal. In the circumstances, the angler is sure to cast in too great haste; in a haste which inevitably defeats his object, and sometimes leads to unfortunate results. While, as has been already said, a fish is being played, the boat drifts to leeward, passing over others which, under more favourable conditions, would certainly grace the basket. Every trout killed is killed at the sacrifice of another.

Would the angler present his fly to every trout in front of him, he must adopt a different plan. Having chosen the stretch of water he desires to fish, he should have the boat taken to leeward, and instruct the boatman to describe a course obliquely across and slightly up-wind, while he himself should cast to windward. The distance traversed by the boat before she is put about is a matter of detail. With the boat so disposed, every yard of water may be searched with care, and few, if any, trout deprived of an opportunity of considering the fly. Should a fish be missed, the angler need not let the incident affect his equanimity; he may cast again as calmly and deliberately as he pleases. Unless the fisherman himself manipulates the net, it

will be found impossible to keep the boat in position during the entire play of a fish ; when the gillie has, for a moment, dropped the oars, she will necessarily drift down-wind, but she drifts over water already fished, leaving that ahead still undisturbed. The method can, of course, be followed only when the wind permits, and it is fatiguing to the angler. As it also entails some extra labour on the boatman, he is certain to have at hand abundant, if unconvincing, reasons for adhering to the time-hallowed system of drifting broadside down the wind.

If the angler be ignorant of the art of casting into the wind, or the wind be so strong that it is impossible to throw a fly against it, drifting becomes compulsory. But the boat should drift stern first. Her head should be held to the wind and the boatman be at the oars prepared to check her course or alter her direction on instruction from the angler or in the exercise of his own judgment. Should a fish rise to, but fail to secure, the fly, the gillie, by a stroke of the oars, keeps the boat above him and enables the angler to cast over him again. As soon as a fish is hooked, the way is taken off the boat and she is held in position until he has been brought on board, when drifting is resumed. That the boatman may be free to give himself entirely

to the conduct of the boat, the fisherman himself should wield the net.

The method is, perhaps, quite as good as that first suggested; it permits the angler to search the water just as thoroughly, and it imposes a lighter tax upon his energies. It demands from the gillie, however, a closer attention to his duties; in the one case he has but to remain passive, and the boat, under the influence of the wind, drifts back over water already exhausted, while in the other he must exert himself to prevent the boat from trespassing on water still unfished.

When a fish is hooked from a boat disposed in the orthodox position, it is the custom to lead it round to windward before bringing it to the net. Though the manœuvre is greatly facilitated by the down-wind course of the boat, it does not invariably succeed. In the case of a small fish, failure is of little moment, but in that of one large enough to demand consideration, the angler need not be surprised should the encounter end in favour of his quarry; the boat drifts over the trout, concealing it from view, and increasing considerably the difficulty of accomplishing its subjection. While the trout is to leeward, it and the boat are not easily kept apart; when their relative positions are reversed, the strain on the line—due on the one hand to

the active resistance of the trout, and on the other to the pull of the boat—renders it almost as difficult to bring them together. Vexation may be simply and easily avoided if the head of the boat be held to the wind and the boatman be at the oars prepared to anticipate the movements of the fish. The angler will, of course, do his best to prevent the trout from passing beneath the boat, but success lies less with him than with the gillie, who, by a little dexterity in the handling of the oars, need have no difficulty in keeping well away. Should, however, the contingency occur in spite of their combined efforts to avert it, the angler must plunge the point of his rod into the water until the line clears the bottom of the boat, then bring it round, either by the bow or by the stern, to the side now occupied by the fish. His purpose accomplished, he should raise the rod smartly and regain command of his quarry's movements.

The motive which prompts the trout to adopt a course against which the angler and his helper should do their utmost to persuade it, is not to sever the line on a jagged fragment of the keel he has just discovered from below. That may, indeed, be the result of the manœuvre, but, that it is deliberately designed by the fish, only the very simple will believe.

When the wind is blowing towards the shore, the angler may conduct his fishing in a series of short drifts. He will find that all around the margin of the loch, and at varying distances from the bank, the bottom falls abruptly away, leaving a sharp line of demarcation between the shallow water and the deep. It is precisely on that line that he may expect to reap his richest harvest; he must not neglect the water within it, but to cast much beyond it, is to waste his energies. Sometimes it will happen to him to take fish only when his flies are passing over what, in the language of the boatman, is called the "broo," and when that is the case he should instruct his gillie to cease drifting and row slowly along, parallel with the brink, and just so far outside of it that it is within an easy cast. His flies will then be, not at intervals and for a moment, but continuously over rising fish, and he will effect a great economy of time and add much to his pleasure.

In angling from the bank the angler is sometimes compelled to employ a line of unwieldy length. In angling from a boat, however, the line need never be long; the angler can always be taken within easy reach of any fish he may wish to cast over. He may rid himself of all anxiety lest the trout be alarmed at his approach; they have so little fear of the boat that

I have seen them rise within the swirl caused by the last stroke of the oar, and I have taken many on flies trailing but a few feet astern. So indifferent are they, indeed, that they have been actually known to leap on board a boat at anchor. Man himself seems to be the only thing of which they are afraid, and him, apparently, they fail to recognise when they see him on the water.

The angler may fish as fine as he pleases, but he has no occasion to fish far off. He should employ a short line and cast frequently, and a cast he may consider spent while his flies are still some distance from the boat and the curve described by his line so slight that he can strike quickly and effectively. A line which is just of the right length when he is erect will be found too long should he attempt to use it when seated.

When fishing a loch from the bank, the angler may burden himself with a net or not, as seems good to him, but to the boat-fisher that implement is indispensable. It should be provided with a long handle, and, that it may not prove in-

adequate should the angler, as he occasionally does, hook a fish of unexpected weight, it must be of some size.

The position of the angler on board a boat is one of much discomfort. His movements are narrowly circumscribed, and he is without a place of rest except the hard, inhospitable stern-sheets. The gunwale, too, appears designed for his embarrassment; it catches him unpleasantly across the waist and denies him the support for which his aching shoulders long.

In fishing from the bank, as from a boat, the angler should devote himself entirely to the shallower portions of the loch. Even these, however, he will not fish without discrimination, and in his choice he will be guided by several considerations, of which the nature of the bottom—so far as it is within sight—is not the least important. While no water deep enough to hold a trout should be heedlessly passed over, he will exercise particular care where stones provide his quarry with convenient cover; but it is in the vicinity of weeds that he should apply himself with greatest assiduity, for there he may most confidently anticipate success. If he be within reach of the "broo," he will certainly find it worthy of his attention. Whether the neighbourhood of a stream is, in itself, likely to reward his efforts, is

extremely doubtful. If the situation has nothing else to recommend it, he need not be surprised should it contribute little to the filling of his creel. The average Highland burn rushes impetuously over a bare and rocky bed, and the fare with which it furnishes the trout contained in it is of the scantiest. It yields them but a meagre living, and, as their larder is never too bountifully plenished, they do not willingly permit a fragment of its contents to pass to the loch below. They rarely know satiety, and only on occasions of unusual spate is their industry unequal to the interception of all the food the stream bears with it. Not until the autumn, when on their way to the redds, do the trout congregate about the burn-mouth. The sandy shallows may not, except during the evening rise, justify the reputation they have earned, but the fish the angler does take there will be found more pleasing to his eye than those he captures elsewhere. The trout taken over a dark bottom are generally black, if not comely, while those which haunt the yellow sands are bright in colour, and, in their beauty, much prized objects of pursuit.

One reads occasionally that certain animals possess the power to change their colour with the object of bringing it into harmony with that of their surroundings. The gift has been conferred on them by a

beneficent Nature anxious to assist them in finding concealment from their enemies. It would be interesting to learn what these enemies think of Nature's interference with their honest efforts to procure a meal; though, in truth, they have little reason to complain, since they, too, share in her favours. She is quite as ready to help the eaters as the eaten. If with one hand she thoughtfully perfects the means of self-protection bestowed upon the prey, with the other she arms the preyer with increasingly efficient weapons of offence. She entertains herself in pitting each against the other. To the Powers she has given a lesson they have not been slow to learn; they have proved apt scholars, and, in devilish ingenuity, have even outdone their teacher. The discovery of an effective system of defence stimulates the inventor to the production of an overpowering method of attack. The armour-plate of great resistance leads inevitably to the shell of high velocity. In reality, animals do not possess the voluntary power ascribed to them; what change of colour or, to be precise, of tone they undergo is as independent of volition as the blush that mantles the modest maiden's cheek. The trout does not consciously assume the hue of his environment.

The angler will be wise to wade. Wading gives him access to a greater area of water and enables him to cast to fish beyond reach from the bank. There is nothing more tantalising than the sight of a large trout rising persistently just without the limits of a cast. The young and eager angler, fearless of consequences, may not let the spectacle disturb his peace of mind. Undeterred by anything so trifling as the lack of waders, he will cheerfully enter the water, chancing a future ill in the hope of securing a present good. He, however, who has outlived his youth, and in his failing energies perceives an intimation of mortality, will, if his limbs be unprotected, persuade himself that the fish is less desirable than it appears, and pass on in search of an easier prey.

Where the loch is fringed with weeds, wading is imperative. Such a fringe is sent the angler for his good; it disciplines his temper and teaches him to bear affliction patiently. When angling from the bank, he finds it impossible to cast beyond its outer border, and every fish he hooks while wading, at once seeks refuge in its intricacies, and, refusing to be drawn, remains

there. But, trying though it sometimes is, the angler would not be without it; it affords protection to the trout and provides a nursery for the organisms on which he lives. The difficulty presented by the weeds, however, is not insuperable; it may be overcome if the trout, in its first surprise, permits the angler to lift its head above the water and drag it hurriedly along the surface to the bank. But unless the angler acts with promptitude, the manœuvre is unlikely to succeed; if he delays until his quarry has regained its scattered wits, he may await a second opportunity in vain.

On open water, the usual three flies may be employed with perfect safety, but where weeds abound, two of them will be wisely dispensed with. When the cast is furnished with a single fly, and it is in the mouth of a fish, there are none to give the angler occasion for profanity.

It is difficult, except to the most skilful, to cast successfully across the wind, and when the breeze is parallel with the shore the angler should enter the water and fish to leeward. In a succession of casts he should describe the arc of a circle, and when he has completed his first series he should take a step forward, causing as little disturbance of the water as possible, before beginning the next. Whether the initial cast be towards

the bank or outwards as far as the wind permits, is of little moment; but it is essential to his success that he should cast lightly, and go carefully over all the water in front of him. Even the immediate neighbourhood of the shore is not to be neglected, for large fish are often caught in water scarcely deep enough to cover them. I have seen a trout quite two pounds in weight rise from under the grassy margin of a Highland loch where the depth seemed insufficient to conceal a parr, and I have killed a fish whose dorsal fin and part of whose back were plainly visible above the surface. In angling from the bank, it is not unusual to find the fly seized as it is being lifted from the water within a few inches of the edge. The angler will soon discover that rising fish are disposed in groups; like the single misfortunes of the Irishman, they seldom appear alone, and where he raises one fish he may confidently hope to meet with others. And that, notwithstanding all the Highland boatman alleges to the contrary, is a sound reason for refusing to abandon a spot on which he is enjoying sport, until he is satisfied that it has been exhausted. It is not necessarily true that he will be quite as successful elsewhere.

In his advice to the loch-fisher Mr. Francis Francis suggests that, in a light wind, he should pay particular

attention to the windward shore, "as in the very curl of the small wave you will often get a pull from the very best fish." The bewildered angler wonders how, while fishing from the windward bank, he is to reach the small wave beating on that opposite, perhaps a mile away, and seeks in vain for help. When, however, he learns in the course of his enquiry that "If it be rough you will be compelled to fish the leeward shores," it becomes apparent that the author of *A Book on Angling* had overlooked the inadvertence of his printer—it is not to be supposed that he was ignorant of the meaning of the terms he used.

Whether the angler fish from the windward or the leeward bank will, of course, be determined largely by the wind. If that be light, he will confine his attention wholly to the latter; in the small wave is his only hope. Except in a light wind, however, there is nothing to be gained by fishing from a lee-shore. The angler is, I know, given many reasons why he should select that in preference to the other bank, but they possess no weight, and need not in the least affect his choice. With the advice, for instance, to cast up-wind that he may draw his flies towards him in the direction of the wave, he has no occasion to concern himself. The spectacle of an insect freely traversing the water of

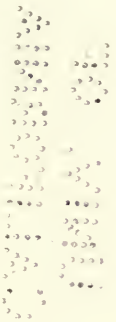
its own will is, to the trout, too familiar to excite remark.

In a gentle wind the smooth water on the weather shore will not, except during the evening rise, reward the angler's industry. If he be unusually expert he may, by the use of fine tackle and small flies, succeed in deceiving an occasional rising fish, but his creel, like the breeze, will be light ; only a Malloch of Perth fills his basket in a calm. Should, however, the wind be of sufficient volume to fret the water on the windward side, he may, in perfect confidence, devote himself to it. His lures will prove as attractive there as elsewhere, and he will, besides, enjoy the advantage of a following wind—though, if he be proficient in the execution of the "downward cut," he will, from the leeward bank, cast a softer fly.

But the angler will seldom have occasion to choose between the banks. Our Scottish lochs are long and narrow, and as the wind generally blows in the direction of their length, it affects both banks impartially. If it be necessary to consider the question of windward and leeward at all, it will not be with reference to the loch as a whole, but to one of the numerous bays with which its margin is indented. While, however, the wind blows along the loch, the wave assumes a slightly different

course; it does not run directly before the wind; it spreads out in fan-like form and breaks obliquely on the shores.

Loch-fishing by day in the absence of wind is the least exciting of sports; the fish may rise, and freely, but not to the angler. In the evening it is otherwise. Then they accept the fly without suspicion in water smooth as glass. It is hard to say why they part with their habitual caution at the close of day, for, until long after sundown, there is still sufficient light to reveal the fictitious nature of the lure; more light, indeed, in the bright, clear twilight of June than at noon on a day of rain. The gloaming seems to affect the vision of the trout to a greater extent than the mere depreciation of the light suffices to explain. During the hour which follows sunset, wind appears positively harmful to the interests of the angler; I, certainly, prefer an evening wholly windless or with just wind enough to facilitate the act of casting. And my preference has sometimes met with the approval of my fellow-anglers—when it has given them what they thought was the advantage of position. To one, at least, it proved a source of infinite satisfaction, since on the occasion to which I refer it left him in undisturbed possession of the favouring ripple, while I, in my simplicity, paced slowly to and fro along the margin of a trifling stretch of placid water



PORT NELLAN.

the knowing angler would have shunned with care. Unhappily, his satisfaction was not lasting; it gave place to another and a different emotion when, at the end of the evening, he discovered that though his basket was unsullied by a scale, mine contained two leash of lovely trout.

It is said that the bigger the wave the brighter the prospects of large fish. What everyone says is presumably true, but the statement is not to be accepted without qualification. Like other angling maxims, it is not of universal application. There is no necessary relation between the size of the wave and that of the fish; indeed, one sometimes finds them in inverse proportion. Not long ago, fishing in a wind so high and a sea so tumultuous that it was difficult to keep the boat on the water, I caught trout in great numbers, but none that, proved by the eight-inch measure cut on one of the thwarts, it was found possible to retain. They were all undersized, and, as usual when small fish are on the move, the larger held aloof. All the boatman's ingenuity failed to coax one of them up to the standard; he patted and stroked them and drew them out to their utmost length, but they remained, without exception, just a fraction of an inch too short. He was in despair. There was an ever-recurring conflict between his rigid,

Presbyterian conscience and his fleshly inclinations, in which the latter were invariably discomfited. They gave in with a bad grace, however, and he followed the fish with a reluctant eye as, restored to liberty, they disappeared swiftly in the brown water. Spite of his grey hairs, he was simple as a little child, and although he had handled trout during his entire life-time, was still unable to estimate their length; between a fish of six and one of eight inches his untutored eye saw no distinction.

"It iss big enough to keep," said he, critically examining our first capture as it lay in the palm of his hand.

"No, no," I exclaimed, "we'll be laughed out of the hotel if we go back with a fish so small. Throw it away."

"But it iss the ferry first we've got; it wud pe a great peety no to put it in the basket. Maybe it wudna be too big for a ferox."

"Measure it, then."

"Hoo can I measure it? I haf no measure here."

"There's one in the boat," I reminded him.

"Where?" he asked, looking enquiringly around as if he expected to find an inch-tape or a three-foot rule lying ready to his hand.

"There," I said, drawing his attention to a couple of notches carved on the seat he was occupying.

"Oh, that!" was the surprised reply; "'deed, an' I wass forgettin' aal about it," and, unable any longer to insist, he dropped the troutling gently overboard.

There seems to exist among anglers a foolish belief that while the finest of tackle is essential to success on the stream, anything will serve their purpose when loch-fishing is in question. The error probably originates in the use of large flies. The fish which are not to be scared by these should see nothing alarming in a correspondingly heavy cast. The reasoning is plausible, but unconvincing. Trout everywhere are quick of sight and easily made afraid, and the precautions observed on the river cannot be safely ignored on the loch. Even if it were true that coarse tackle failed to impair the success of the angler, it would seriously mar his enjoyment of the sport, unless, indeed, he gauges his enjoyment by the number of fish he kills and not by the conditions under which he kills them. We are all, of course, pleased to produce a well-filled creel in testimony of our prowess, but our liveliest pleasure precedes the actual capture of the trout; it is in the pursuit, not in the possession, that we find our greatest joy. In the excitement, the delightful excitement, which accom-

panies the playing of a large and vigorous fish on gut as light as gossamer, there is an element of fear that our quarry may escape us. Without the anxiety which haunts us from the moment we have hooked a trout until we have placed it safely in the basket or on board the boat, angling would be deprived of much of its charm. There is no satisfaction in a victory gained by mere superiority of strength; when the result is a foregone conclusion it ceases to interest us. Were the angler's purpose solely the acquisition of fish, he would accomplish it much more speedily and much more surely by the employment of a net.

In the boy, the dread of losing the object of his desire is the predominating emotion, and he gives the fish no law. He is unhappy until it is within his possession, and hastens the moment which sees it palpitating at his feet. He fishes with the heaviest and stoutest gut he can procure. He has no thought of art for art's sake; he longs for material results, and the more expeditiously they can be attained the better pleased he is. With experience, however, he ceases to value the trout as an article of property; it becomes an object on which he may exercise his skill, and in the knowledge that his success in bringing it to the net is due less to the strength of his tackle than to the dex-

terity with which he wields the rod lies the secret of his pleasure.

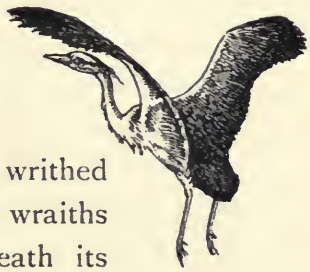
The trout in the majority of our Scottish lochs average little more than a quarter of a pound in weight, and they afford no sport save on the most delicate of tackle. Since, however, the angler may find an occasional triton among the minnows, his cast, though fine, must be sound. It must be capable of meeting all contingencies. There is small satisfaction in fishing with a cast so frail that the chances are all in favour of the fish ; that, no matter how deft the angler, his failure is assured. He will, too, occasionally find large trout in the most improbable of places, and he should be prepared to deal with the situation. Of one such discovery I have curiously conflicting recollections.

It was, however unlike it, a morning in August. During the night a chill, damp mist had crept up from the sea and enveloped the landscape in its clammy folds. Our goal—a profound secret—was a little lochan high on the distant tops, and the way to it was long and weary. When we left the road which winds its sinuous way among the hills, we stepped upon a trackless wild, but to my companion the hillside was familiar as his own kail-yard, and he strode the heather with the confidence of perfect knowledge. So dense was the fog

and so unvarying and featureless the pall it hung around us that we seemed, not to pass through it, but to bear it with us. We moved encircled by a curtain of cloud which kept pace with our advance. Rarely, it was wafted aside for a moment, revealing a heath-clad slope in front, only to close in on us again, swiftly and silently, when the light wind had passed. It did not entirely isolate us. Though impenetrable to the eye, it left the ear in communication with an outer world. We saw nothing save the blank, white wall, but the air was filled with sound; with one sound, the saddest in all nature, the plaintive bleating of unhappy ewes lamenting the removal of their young.

As we toiled painfully and slowly upward, we were occasionally aware of other signs of life. Now a sheep, startled by our sudden intrusion on the solitude, sprang aside from our path and, with a whistle of alarm, disappeared from view; now a grouse-cock, unwarned of our approach — the grouse seems to possess a defective sense of hearing—hurled himself from

the ground at our feet and fled in ludicrous panic, shrieking his absurd appeal, "Go back! go back!" I was longing earnestly for the end of the arduous climb, when I came suddenly and unexpectedly upon the loch. I shuddered at sight of it. Two great funereal piles of rock stood threateningly in front, as if set to bar the way, and between and beyond them lay a black, repulsive water. A heron rose slowly from the bank as we approached, and, with hoarse croak, flapped heavily into the mist, which swathed the hills as a shroud, and writhed along the loch in thin wisps like the wraiths of long-forgotten dead asleep beneath its inky wave. The loch was wrapped in an atmosphere of awe. It suggested all kinds of gruesome thoughts; of graves, and charnel houses, and the dim, dark under-world beyond. Murder and sudden death lurked in its sullen depths. Crimes unspeakable lay hidden beneath its sombre waters. I neared it with hesitating feet, and it was almost in dread that I cast a fly on its forbidding surface. What it contained I knew not, but surely no mortal trout swam in that unholy tarn.



> "O'er all there hung a shadow and a fear;
> A sense of mystery the spirit daunted
> And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
> The place is haunted."

I was unpleasantly conscious of the close presence of something weird and uncanny, and moved furtively about, a prey to vague, unapprehended fears. I was an intruder on ground not meant for human foot.

It was but a little piece of water, and it promised me no sport. All I could reasonably hope to get from it was a few small trout, black as the bottom of peat on which it rested. Exhausted by the long ascent, I threw myself upon the heather above the margin of the loch and dropped a languid fly into the water below. The outlook was discouraging, and, lying still, I cast idly and without interest in front of me. I was thinking of anything except the occupation in which I was perfunctorily engaged, when my wandering thoughts were hurriedly recalled by a great upheaval of the water in the vicinity of my tail fly. The fish did not reveal himself, nor did he touch the lure, but from the commotion he produced he was obviously no puny trout. My listlessness forsook me in a flash, and I became at once as keen and eager as I had been indifferent before. Springing to my feet, I cast over him again, prepared to strike at

the faintest indication of a rise, but he refused me an opportunity of repairing my mistake. He had, however, put me on the alert, and I began to fish with circumspection and in hope.

I was fishing fine, but, though convinced that my preconceptions of the character of the trout in the loch had been absurdly far astray, I did not change my cast. It was, I thought, sound enough to withstand any strain to which it was likely to be subjected, and the light, uncertain wind scarcely stirred the surface of the water. There was reason to fear that, in the circumstances, even the most delicate of gut would challenge the attention of the trout and excite their apprehension. But, as it proved, there was no occasion for concern; my flies were accepted with a confidence that was touching, and before I left the tarn five great fish had succumbed to their seduction. They were a revelation to me. I had anticipated small, dark, unsightly trout not worth the trouble their pursuit involved; those I found were large, well-conditioned, and beautifully bright in colour. Of the possibilities of the loch my gillie, to be sure, was well aware, but, probably with the object of springing a surprise on me, he had kept his knowledge carefully concealed.

But though a delight to the eye, on the hook the

fish were a painful disappointment. Lusty and powerful as they looked, they put up no fight; their energy was spent in one short rush, and thereafter, persuaded by the pliant reed, they came to the bank with a meekness surpassing that of the lamb to the slaughter. They bowed to the will of Fate with a resignation exasperating to the angler in search of a sensation. Fat and, apparently, scant of breath like Hamlet, they seemed incapable of prolonged or violent exertion. Of the five, only one made any display of vigour and activity, and as, on finding his liberty restricted, he sprang into the air, he appeared a very salmon. At sight of him my heart leapt, and I looked forward to an anxious and exciting time, but he was quick as the others to recognise his destiny, and all too soon he lay stretched upon the shingle by the water's edge, a much less noble fish than fancy—and the fog—had pictured him.

As a source of pleasurable excitement to the angler, the fish were almost valueless, but in their beauty they were not unworthy of his quest. They were all of a size, from one and a half to two pounds in weight, and their presence in a water so unlikely was not easily explained. To the unscientific fisherman, at least, the problem of their food supply was quite beyond solution, though the entomologist might have found the explana-

tion of their bulk in the peaty loam with which the bottom of the loch was thickly lined. It was certainly not on a diet of fish that they had thriven so lustily, for they roamed the depths of the water alone.

Though the loch had afforded me an unexpected pleasure, I was glad to get away from it. It was a relief to escape its eerie influence. When we prepared to leave its banks, the fog had been long dispelled, but even the sun, which now shone down on it from a cloudless sky, failed to lighten the gloom in which it was enwrapped. I am ignorant of its name, but no loch has a better title to be known as "dubh."

Now, I may have erred in supposing that about the ground around the loch there was anything particularly sacred, but to Alastair and me it was certainly taboo. Right to board that galley we had none. And our success had perched us on the horns of

a dilemma; the sacrifice of fish so lovely and so dearly bought was not to be endured, yet to take them with us was to publish wide the story of our trespass. "What," I enquired of the partner of my guilt, "shall we do? M'Tavish will see at once that these trout have not been taken from Loch-an-Leannan." Alastair reserved his answer; he was, for the moment, without an inspiration. During the subsequent descent of the hill, however, he was obviously pondering the weighty problem, and ere we reached the loch on which, had we been honest anglers, we should have been engaged, his subtle intellect—he might have been a Jesuit—had found a simple means of satisfying every disconcerting query. Placing the fish in the net, he plunged them beneath the water, and, with a smile, said: "It's not a lie I will be telling them; the troot *have* come oot o' Loch-an-Leannan"!

In its application to the loch, the question, "What is the proper fly?" is wholly superfluous. The angler need not concern himself about the parochial limitations of the trout's menu. He will find the fish in one loch very much like those in another, similar in their tastes and appreciating the same fare. He has no occasion to burden himself with a great variety of flies; they are things of beauty and make a brave show in the

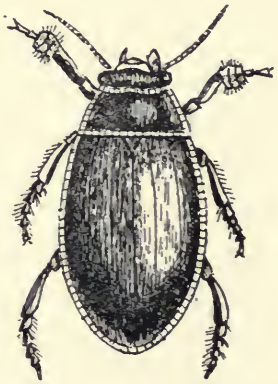
wallet, but the only purpose served by their diversity is the gratification of his æsthetic sense. Between Tweedside and John o' Groat's the half-dozen patterns prescribed by Stewart will suffice for all his wants. The trout he fails to entice with these will be found insensible to the charms of the most seductive-looking lures he likes to offer them. If, however, he is not satisfied with Stewart's flies, he may furnish himself with those of Mr. Cholmondeley-Pennell.. Since he will find one selection quite as useful as the other, it is a matter of indifference which he chooses. But he has no need to adopt either unless he pleases; in making his choice he may safely rely on his own taste, which he will certainly find in harmony with that of the fish.

Mr. Cholmondeley-Pennell maintains that the first three flies on his list are indispensable to the loch-fisher. It is a courageous statement, but we may presume that he feels justified in making it. Personally, I am aware of no fly with which we could not dispense without a sacrifice of sport, but were I asked with which lure I should be least willing to part, I should answer, unhesitatingly, the Red Hackle—in any of its varied dressings. It seems that every angler has a favourite fly, a fly he is never willingly without, and that named is mine. I am not, however, in a position

to submit any scientific evidence in justification of my choice. My preference, my affection, for the fly is possibly altogether sentimental; I remember it gratefully as the lure by which I first succeeded in deceiving the shy and cautious trout. I cannot conscientiously affirm that it is more fatally fascinating than other flies; if in my experience it seems to have proved specially alluring, it may not be because of any merit of its own, but because it has had larger opportunities. Other lures I have had in intermittent use, but it has occupied a permanent position on my cast. They have come and gone; it goes on for ever. What it resembles I do not pretend to know, but I have yet to see the water on which it will not prove attractive. Armed with it alone, I have attained success as great as, and sometimes greater than, that of those still under the dominion of traditional belief.

If there is anything to criticise in Mr. Pennell's flies, it is their size. Unless they are inaccurately figured in the Badminton Library volume on angling, they are unnecessarily large. There is no apparent reason why the flies with which we fish the loch should be larger than those designed for the river. Since there is no essential difference between the two, since the loch is but an expanded pool, the lure which proves enticing on the one should not be without attraction on the

other. The majority of our trout streams are, to be sure, small and comparatively shallow, but the trout in the loch are not found in the depths, but in water not more than six or eight feet deep. In loch-fishing we habitually employ flies much too large. It is true that they kill, for they do not exceed in size many of the insects familiar to the fish, but they are, I think, less fatal than those employed upon the stream. Large flies are of value only when the sea is high; small flies in any condition of the water. In a calm the employment of the latter is imperative; in a breeze they serve the angler's purpose quite as efficiently as the former.



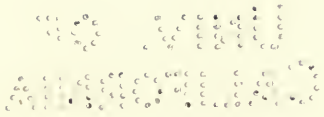
The trout is keen of sight and detects the presence of the smallest object even on the crest of a breaking wave. Even though the angler fail to raise more fish to the smaller flies, he will probably secure more, for, since they do not so readily betray their character, the trout accept them in greater confidence and are less likely to come short to them.

I am in the habit of fishing a little loch of which it was, at one time, confidently said, that the great, full-

fed trout contained in it were too indolent to rise to anything smaller than a Mayfly. On an object less in size they turned a slow, uninterested eye; it was unworthy of an effort more demonstrative. When, in the course of years, the fishing changed hands, it was discovered with surprise that the fish possessed more energy and were less discriminating in their choice of food than had been thought. The new tenants, ignorant of, or indifferent to, the traditional reputation of the trout, fished the loch with small flies and had every reason to be pleased with their reception.

The conviction that the trout were to be taken only with large flies had endured for years, but, as it was entirely without foundation, it failed to survive the simplest test. It, of course, received no new adherents, but those by whom it had been held were loth to give it up; they clung to it with great tenacity, and listened, incredulous, to tales of giant trout accepting readily the most diminutive of lures. They refused to acknowledge the evidence while they could, and only when it was no longer possible to doubt, did they grudgingly consent to modify their views. They would not frankly admit their error, but weakly sought to evade the difficulty by assuming that the tastes and habits of the trout had undergone a sudden change. We are all slow to part

THE DOCHART.



with dear, long-entertained beliefs, and many of us, while willing enough to be convinced, would, like the disputant of the story, be pleased to see the man who could convince us.

What objects in nature are supposed to be reproduced in the gaudy confections we call loch-flies, we do not know. They are made in the likeness of nothing entomological, and probably owe their origin to the whim of their designers. They certainly bear no resemblance to anything specific within the experience of the trout, and if he takes them—and he does take them just as readily as he takes the most truthful imitation of nature—it is not because he sees in them objects whose qualities, as articles of diet, he has already proved. They are apparently alive, and few things living come amiss to him.

But not all our loch-flies are nondescripts; for one, at least, has a prototype been found in nature. It has been discovered that the Red and Teal embodies the artist's conception of the so-called fresh-water shrimp. To the unimaginative observer, the likeness between the bright scarlet and pale grey product of art and the dingy, yel-

low-brown little crustacean is not very obvious; is, indeed, so far from obvious that, if the trout be capable of confounding them, the contention of Sir Herbert Maxwell must be held as proved. To a fish not colour-blind, the distinction between the two must be glaringly apparent. Even assuming that the trout may fail to distinguish the colour of the fly, is it credible that he can mistake an object as big as a butterfly—the lure is sometimes dressed large—for the diminutive gammarus? But, since the lure in question seems to bear a resemblance to a great variety of things, the angler need not let the matter disturb his equanimity; he will find the practical utility of the fly quite unaffected by our theories of its origin.

"Of course," writes Mr. Andrew Lang, "on a Sutherland loch one man is as good as another; the expert no better than the duffer." There is a general impression that even on lochs less remote all anglers are in a position of equality. The genesis of the impression is not hard to trace. The loch, except in a calm, affords little opportunity for the exercise of skill. Casting ceases to be an art; the angler has but to raise his rod, and his flies, borne forward on the favouring breeze, fall softly on the water. Knowledge of the habits of the trout is a useless possession; it gives the

learned little advantage over the learner ; their chances of raising fish are almost on a par. But we know that on the loch, as on the river, fortunes vary and baskets are not all alike. Two men fishing together under the same weather conditions and with similar lures may show very different results on quitting the water in the evening. And the difference between them may not be confined to an isolated instance ; it may be repeated day after day while they remain on the loch. It does not necessarily imply that the art of the successful angler surpasses that of his less fortunate companion, but it is too constant to be ascribed to chance. It obviously owns a cause in continuous operation ; it suggests a permanent distinction between the men themselves.

My friend Thomson is one of the most fortunate fishermen I know. Fish what loch he pleases, he generally contrives to hold his own, and not infrequently he succeeds in beating all competitors. Having few theories concerning flies, he accepts without demur those his tackle-maker recommends to him, provided they be small and dressed on the finest of gut. As he is but an indifferent performer with the rod, and knows it, he gives himself no credit for a success entirely due to what, he asseverates, is luck. Since, however, it

is rare to find the fickle goddess so unremittingly attentive, his explanation does not altogether satisfy our reason. I had once the pleasure of spending a day in his society and of studying his methods, in which there seemed to me nothing strikingly original. There were eight anglers on the loch, and all were equally affected by the weather, which could scarcely have been less propitious. It blew hard, and nicety in casting was not required; even the splash of a clumsily thrown salmon-fly would have passed unperceived in the turmoil of waters. My friend began fishing with the others and left the loch when they did, yet his creel contained exactly the same number of fish as all the rest together.

The popular opinion that the loch is a democracy in which all men are equal, is erroneous. It may, however, be true enough that the adept is no better than the tyro; as the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, so success in loch-fishing is not to the skilful. In angling, as in other things, success is the reward of diligence. It is the persevering fisher whose basket is heaviest at the end of the day. If fortune is to be won, it must be wooed; it will not come unsought. The successful angler is not easily discouraged. He does not, when trout are coy, lay

aside his rod and seek consolation in that never-failing comforter, the pipe; nor, withdrawing to the shade of a convenient tree, find alleviation of his grief in sleep. Whether fish are on the move or not, his efforts are sustained. Though continuous casting on a blank and unresponsive water damps the ardour of the most sanguine, hope never entirely deserts him. He maintains a Mark Tapleyan cheerfulness in the most adverse and depressing of circumstances, and continues to "peg away," certain that where there are trout his industry is not all in vain. He secures an occasional fish which the indolent would inevitably miss.

The secret of my own good luck was once revealed to me by a candid boatman.

"I ken noo," said he, when we had been several days together, "hoo ye catch sae mony mair fish than ony ither body."

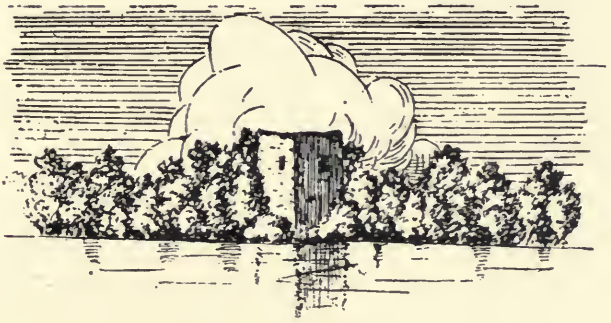
"Why?" I asked, anticipating a compliment.

"It's juist," was the reply, "because ye're never done. Ye're aye cast, castin', an' ye canna lay doon yer rod even when ye're at yer lunch."

As I had been pluming myself on what I had been pleased to think my superior skill, I was inclined to resent the commonplace and humiliating explanation of my success. Now I am wiser. I know that the boatman was right, and I agree with him as I agree with the ancient Highlander who, in answer to something I had said, declared that, "If ye waant to catch fish, ye maun keep yer flees in the waater." It is quite true; the trout caught by the flies in the boat or on the bank are easily counted.

Loch-fishing is at its best in the early part of the season, and the months during which it is most successfully pursued are April, May, and June. On some lochs, such as Loch Katrine and Loch Ard, the sport is of very short duration; it is practically over before the end of May. July is, as a rule, unprofitable to the loch fisher, and August is, if anything, still worse. During these two months the trout, apparently satiated with surface food, refuse to rise to the fly by day, although after sundown they still continue to afford entertainment to the angler. With the advent of September, however, they show a disposition to resume their surface-feeding habits, but, as by that time they are beginning to lose condition, their quest yields little satisfaction. But, as concerns the time at which they

may be visited with greatest profit to the angler, lochs differ widely from each other. When the fishing in one is long past its best, that in another, perhaps but a few miles away, has not yet begun. Since, therefore, it is impossible to discuss the subject in any but general terms, the angler in search of specific information should consult Lyall's *Sportsman's Guide.* In it, he will probably find all he desires to know.



CHAPTER V

THE WEATHER

THE angler may fish in any condition of weather he pleases; not, however, that all weathers are equally propitious, but that no weather need keep him from the water. There are times when past experience leads us to anticipate an empty creel, but since from past experience we have also learned that we cannot, in any circumstances, foretell with certainty the mood in which we shall find the fish, we need never despair—nor ever feel confident of success. The question of weather as it affects fly-fishing is as old as that art itself. It troubled our fathers as it troubles us, and as it will continue to trouble those by whom we are succeeded. We have

added nothing to our knowledge since Venator was informed that he who considers the subject too curiously "shall be a little superstitious."

The atmospheric causes to which we ascribe the seemingly erratic behaviour of the trout are, with our information, past finding out. Not until some one with a Darwin's faculty for generalization has furnished us with new facts and co-ordinated those we now possess, shall we have an explanation of his caprices. He has taught us that in angling, more than in anything else, it is the unexpected that happens, and the surprises with which he provides us follow each other so frequently that they soon cease to surprise. His conduct is altogether incalculable. On one day we find him accepting the fly with delightful alacrity, and on the next, under what are, to us, precisely similar conditions, he is not to be charmed by the most fascinating fly in our possession. The weather which, to-day, seems to favour the interests of the angler, he finds, to-morrow, arrayed on the side of his quarry. I have, on a day of alternate sunshine and shower, taken fish only while the rain continued falling; and I have, on the contrary, seen them put down at once by an approaching cloud, to reappear when the sun was again on the water.

"Is this a good day for fishing?" is a question frequently submitted to the angler on his way towards the water. The subtle distinction between fishing and catching fish, though obvious to the small boy caught sinfully plying his rod on Sunday, generally escapes the questioner. His language lacks precision. It fails to convey his meaning with perfect accuracy. What he really desires to learn is, whether the day is one on which the trout are likely to be rising freely—and that, the angler, being neither a prophet nor the son of one, cannot tell him. We may call no man happy until he is dead, nor, until it is over, can we say of a day that it is either good or bad. It is as foolish to weigh one's basket before the evening as to count one's chickens while they are still in the egg. What constitutes a good day it is impossible to define. There are, to be sure, days on which we feel justified in anticipating success, and others on which we have reason to fear defeat, but, since our hopes and our fears alike rest on probabilities alone, we have no assurance that they will be realized. Our hopes may be belied and the failure we dreaded be converted into our greatest triumph. I have returned blank on a day that seemed made for the angler, and the heaviest creel I ever carried home was filled in a blinding snow-storm.

There is a popular impression that a grey day is favourable to the prospects of the angler. I do not doubt it, but the description is inadequate; it is too vague and indefinite to enable us to recognise the particular variety of grey day enshrined in the belief. I remember one such day which fully justified the popular faith. The temperature was high; there was not a breath of wind stirring; the air was close and muggy—steamy as that of a laundry—and a thin rain dripped slowly from a sky monotonously drab. I was not fishing, but curiosity prompted me to visit the water. I stood on the bank with fingers itching to grasp a rod, and watched the fish. They were rising in numbers, but they, too, seemed to feel the enervating influence of the day, and their movements were languid and slow. They rose quietly and leisurely, and in taking the fly scarcely broke the surface of the water. But what they lacked in haste they made up in perseverance, for they continued to feed with the same calm deliberation during all the time I kept them under observation.

That is one type of grey day, but there are others, and others less likely to promote the fortunes of the angler. When dark, and ragged, and rain-laden clouds drive low across the sky, and a hard, cold wind is sweeping in fitful gusts along the water, the trout ob-

stinately refuse to consider the fly. The surface of the loch, cheerless and bleak, is a lifeless waste on which the angler casts his lure in vain. He may persevere for hours with a perseverance worthy of a more hopeful cause, may change his flies again and again, may resort to every artifice he knows, but his labour wins no recompense. In the circumstances, the stream yields him just as little profit. A chill, squally, variable wind is the pet aversion of the Highland gillie. "I don't," he groans, "like thae black squaals on the waater; we'll no get a fesh the day," and his evil prognostications are invariably fulfilled. Well, not perhaps invariably; if even on such days the trout were not occasionally disposed to approach the surface, the angler would know that in, at least, one variety of weather he might spare himself the unnecessary trouble of putting up his rod. What it is that, under the conditions I have indicated, prevents the fish from rising, I cannot tell. It is not the cold, for I have taken trout when the temperature was below freezing point and ice covered the shallow water by the margin of the loch; nor, since sport is often lively in a gale, is it that the gusty wind blows the flies from off the surface. We should, possibly, seek the cause of the trout's in-

difference in the combination of conditions which we name the "day," and it may be that he is affected, not directly, but through the medium of his food. Certain states of weather, which elude analysis, interfere with that process in the life-history of the fly known, I understand, as the "hatch," and as the trout fails to find the fly either mature on the surface of the water or in its nymphal stage on its way towards it, he is compelled to stay the cravings of appetite on what he can gather on the bottom or among the weeds. The explanation is not quite satisfactory; the trout does not rise to the natural fly, for the very sufficient reason that there is no fly to rise to, but that need not render him insensible to the angler's lure should it be brought within his sight. It probably requires an abundance of surface food to stimulate his palate and tempt him from his habitual haunts in the mirky depths of the water. A vagrant insect is not worth his notice.

No, a grey day does not necessarily ensure the angler's happiness. Not even on the southerly wind and the cloudy sky he, like the huntsman, beseeches of his gods,

can he implicitly rely. While there may be some justification for the boon he craves, he will find, not infrequently, the bright presence of the sun still more favourable to his interests. Early in the season, if the water be sufficiently disturbed to aid him in concealing the unreality of his lure, he may hope to achieve a greater success under a cloudless than under a veiled sky.

The east wind is the bugbear of the fisherman. For years, since before Dame Juliana Berners' days indeed, it has been thought destructive of his hopes. But though an ill wind, "nae maitter," as the old woman said, "whitna airt it blaws frae," it is better than its reputation. There is a soul of good in all things evil, and even it is not without a saving grace. It is the favourite wind on Loch Leven, and, did we do it the justice it deserves, it would be held in equal estimation elsewhere. Why it does not prejudice the success of the angler on the historic loch which holds such melancholy interest for the Scot, we learn from Mr. W. Earl Hodgson. It seems that when it first impinges on our shores, the east wind is relatively mild and temperate, and that the cold, harsh character for which it is so justly infamous, is gradually acquired as it sweeps across the country towards the west. In forced obedience to

an imperative necessity of his being, man seeks to penetrate effects to the causes underlying them. He demands the reason of phenomena and is unhappy till he gets it—or something sufficiently resembling it to satisfy his scientific curiosity. But his thirst for knowledge is sometimes easily assuaged, and hypothesis too often fills the place that should be occupied by fact. Mr. Hodgson assumes that the influence the east wind exercises in Kinross is unlike that it exercises in Argyllshire, and, in support of one unwarranted assumption, employs a second equally unreasonable. There is, so far as I am aware, no evidence that the east wind undergoes the change affirmed by Mr. Hodgson; and experience has convinced me that, if it promotes the pleasure of the angler on Loch Leven, it is no less helpful to the angler on waters nearer the Atlantic coast.

Many years ago, when tasks which now I willingly evade were undertaken lightly, I visited, in the early hours of a bleak June morning, a little loch set in the middle of a wide plateau high up among the hills of Cowal. The wind was easterly and very cold, and, to add to my discomfort, rain was falling heavily. So dismal was the outlook, that it seemed folly to proceed, and reason suggested that I should return to the

warmth and comfort of the bed I had just vacated. But the suggestion passed unheeded, and, cold, wet, and dejected, I pursued my way, cursing the stupidity by which I had been drawn abroad on such a morning. The sight presented by the loch was ample compensation for all that I had undergone or was likely yet to undergo. Cold, rain, all things unpleasant, were instantly forgotten, and the gloom in which my thoughts were wrapped incontinently fled. It was no longer folly by which I had been prompted to defy the elements; it was a happy inspiration. Tails were flashing into sight in all directions, and audible above the soughing of the wind and the washing of the water on the shingle, was the loud, continuous sound of splashing trout. The spectacle was one to arouse the enthusiasm of the least excitable of anglers, and with stiff and uncertain fingers I hastily put up my rod. Though in the extraordinary activity of the trout as they dashed to and fro on the surface of the water there was a hint of frolic, they were not in play. Their animation had a serious

NEARING THE END.

motive ; it was the result of a fortunate conjunction of unusual opportunity and ever-ravenous appetite. So hungry were the fish that my flies were seized as soon as they reached the surface, and so confiding in their hunger that it was almost in shame that I consigned them to my creel. But I was young and eager, and never before had I been given a chance of glutting my passion for the rod. Memorable as the occasion was, I look back on it with little satisfaction, for I continued to fish long after I had wrung from the sport all the pleasure it was capable of yielding. Had I been older and wiser, I would have ceased while still at the height of my enjoyment ; I should have known that satiety would be followed by the usual revulsion.

An evil reputation is not easily lived down, and many generations of anglers will have passed, before the east wind receives the recognition its virtues merit. *It* is not the wind that most deserves the angler's execrations. The ancient doggerel which affirms that

> "When the wind is in the north
> The skilful fisher goes not forth,"

has reason—if it has not rhyme—to recommend it. It may not be literally true, for he is unworthy of the name of angler who is kept from the water by any wind that blows, but the hint it conveys of the character of

the north wind will be appreciated by every fly-fisher. That wind has certainly done me nothing but unkindnesses, and its last and crowning injury I am unlikely ever to forget. Many suns have gone down on my wrath since my unhappy experience of its malice, and they will be followed by many more before I can think of it with equanimity.

I was fishing a Loch Fyne-side loch in which the trout are so plentiful and so ready to accept what the honest angler offers them that sport soon palls and one grows weary of the useless slaughter. Their facile capture involves no skill, and, since they are small, yields little pleasure. On the occasion referred to, however, they were unusually dour, and the unremitting industry of a long day was inadequately rewarded with a dozen poor fish.

During an entire week the wind sat—if anything in such impetuous motion can properly be said to sit—stubbornly in the north. It blew a perfect hurricane, and brought with it frequent showers of hail and sleet, against the pitiless

assaults of which the hapless anglers were without defence. It came in wild and vicious gusts, tearing the foaming crests from the waves and whirling them in spindrift down the loch. It blustered and stormed and almost drove us from the water in its fury. So full of purpose seemed its violence, that it was hard to believe ourselves the victims of soulless force and not the sport of a vindictive demon whose dearest mission in life was to harass and annoy the angler. It pursued us unrelentingly, and seemed to howl and shriek in fiendish enjoyment of our discomfiture. There was no escape from it; go where we would, it sought and never failed to find us. Outside, it blew in a uniform direction down the loch, but in the nooks and corners into which we vainly fled for shelter, it was variable and uncertain, and swirled about from point to point in a manner quite confounding. It screamed down every hollow in the hills and raged round every headland, and was here, and there, and everywhere at once. It caught at the angler's rod and strove to wrest it from his grasp; it assailed himself and did its wicked best to hurl him from the boat. It deprived angling of all its pleasure and converted it into a continuous struggle, in which the fisherman rarely secured an advantage. Angling was impossible; if the angler, seeking to

utilize a seemingly propitious moment, made an attempt to cast, the wind, waiting the opportunity, turned suddenly about, and, seizing his line, dashed it in his face. If, in its malicious playfulness, it did permit his flies to reach the surface, they were immediately snatched up and blown, like Tennyson's rooks, "about the sky."

Uncertain as are the conditions under which the angler's pastime is pursued, there is one variety of weather in which he may anticipate success with a confidence he will seldom find misplaced. It may occur at any time throughout the summer, and generally continues for several days together. It is distinguished by unusual warmth, by sunny skies, and by the ordered

conduct of that symbol of inconstancy, the wind, which, starting from the east at break of day, accompanies the sun upon his daily race, and slips quietly back into the east again as night prepares to spread her mantle o'er a tired and slumberous world. On the evening of such a day the trout are almost certain to be rising freely.

Of one June evening of the kind I still retain a very pleasant memory. The sun is setting amid streaks of purple cloud in a sky of amethyst and green. The loch is placid as a mirror, save where an occasional caddis-

fly, just relieved of its pupal-case, scurries along the surface of the water. The flies pursue their aimless way unchecked, for the trout are not yet on the move. Neither is the angler. He lies outstretched upon the grassy bank, falling, like the mild-eyed Lotus-eaters, asleep in a half dream. It is an hour inviting to reverie. Sunk in thought, he lies unconscious of his surroundings. A pair of summer-snipe flit past him, emitting their peculiar note, but he does not see them; a "peesweep" overhead, coming on him unawares, utters a cry of alarm as it suddenly diverges in its flight, but he does not hear it. There is but one sound to which his ears are open. The loud "flop" of a feeding fish recalls

him to a sense of his position, and he awakes with a start, to realize that the sun has left the sky and his hour is come. He springs to his feet, lifts the rod lying at his side, and as he passes his cast, exposed to a prolonged soaking, through his fingers, carefully scans the water near. As he gazes, a large phryganea comes to the surface just beyond the weeds, and, after discarding its now useless shuck, makes hurriedly for the bank. The drag it occasions would be the despair of the dry-fly fisher, but excites no apprehension in the fish. While the angler is speculating on the probabilities of its gaining a place of safety, there is a swirl in the water and its brief career abruptly terminates. It is speedily avenged. The angler's fly drops lightly into the centre of the disturbance caused by the rising fish and is allowed to sink. There is a moment of expectancy; the water again breaks, the line tightens with a jerk and runs quickly out, and soon a lovely trout of a pound and a half in weight lies quivering at the angler's feet. Not a second has been lost in playing him, for the fish are now astir and time is of inestimable value. They are rising in the shallows all around the margin of the loch, and if not in great numbers, for the water is but thinly populated, in numbers sufficient to promise him abundant sport.

The loch is no longer the glassy expanse it was before sundown; an air of wind, the usual evening zephyr, has come out of the east, ruffling the surface of the water and shivering into a thousand gems of light the glow reflected from the still luminous sky. The angler loiters along the windward bank, casting as he goes. He does not confine himself to rising fish; he knows that beneath, if unseen, are others eager to act as the instruments of Fate in accomplishing the end of some poor, unsuspecting fly. Yet eye and ear are alert to warn him of a rise, and he is ready, at a moment's notice, to abandon the quest of the fish which may be, for that of the fish which is. Though his attitude befits his occupation and the scene, he is occasionally betrayed into unbecoming haste; now and then the sight of a swirl on the water some distance off sends him hurrying to the spot before the trout has time to leave it. Sometimes, too, in his anxiety to make the most of the short hour at his disposal, he runs excitedly from trout to trout in a manner quite destructive of his dignity, and possibly also of his hopes.

The rise continues until the close approach of dark, when it ceases as suddenly as it began. While the angler is hastily playing his last fish, others are at hand awaiting his leisure, but by the time it has been placed

within his creel they have disappeared, to return no more to-night. He has taken eleven fish, averaging fully a pound in weight, but, anxious to obtain the dozen, determines, spite of long experience, to continue fishing. The water, lately dimpled everywhere by feeding trout, is now tranquil and quiet, and after a quarter of an hour's unprofitable labour he is compelled to desist, his tale still incomplete.

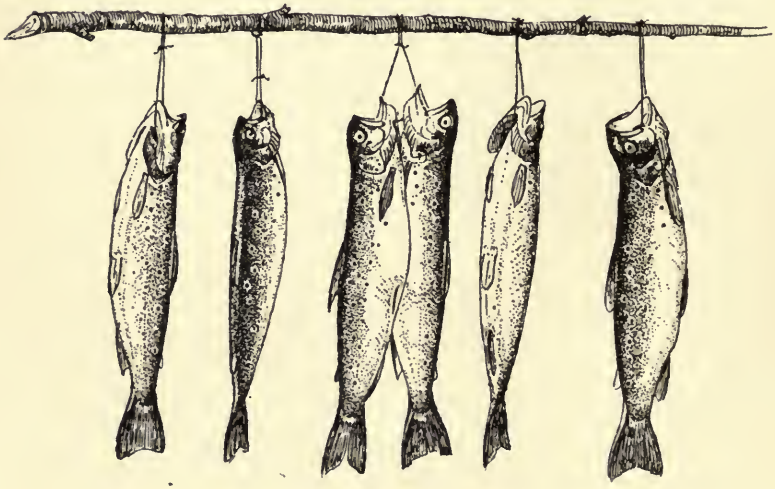
The following extract from my note-book concerns just such an occasion as that I have endeavoured to describe:—"April 20th, 1901. Evening, 7.30 to 8.30, after a bright and exceptionally warm day. Wind in the morning east, during the day south-west, now south-east, and scarcely strong enough to ruffle the surface of the water. Several fish on move, of which I rose five, hooked four, and killed three of four pounds weight. With one exception, they were caught by casting into the ring produced by a rising fish and permitting the fly to sink. Two were taken on a small Red and Teal; the other on a Grouse and Claret."

There are, however, conditions under which even the finest evening proves a disappointment to us. It is said that fly-fishing may be successfully pursued by the pale light of the moon. While there is every reason to believe the statement true, it finds no support

in my own experience. On the water on which much of my little learning was acquired, the beams of M'Farlane's lantern are absolutely fatal to success No matter how beautiful the evening or how bright has been the day it closes, failure, complete and certain, attends the angler's efforts when the moon is in the sky. Under her baneful influence, the trout cling close to cover though flies in myriads are flitting over the surface of the loch.

Tradition dies hard; even the cat maintains a less tenacious grasp of life. A stern-chase is proverbially a long chase, and error, once well started on its course, is very slowly overhauled by truth. Though frequently refuted, the statement that in thunder trout retire to the deepest depths of the water, still bobs

up at intervals, as buoyantly as ever. It is entirely without foundation; I have seen trout rising freely while the thunder rolled and the lightning flashed all round us.



CHAPTER VI

LOOSE STRANDS

MAN, whatever his political persuasion, is at heart conservative. He is slow to adopt an innovation. Its advantages must be obvious or his necessities great ere he gives it a ready welcome. Even when its advantages *are* obvious, he does not invariably receive it with acclamation. Numerous and patent as its merits are, the eyed-fly is long in attaining popularity. Except among dry-fly anglers, it is rarely seen in use. I have but once encountered a wet-fly fisher with whom it had found favour; many

had never heard of it, and in others it aroused no curiosity. The cause of their indifference is not easily discovered ; the superiority of the eyed-fly is so decided that one might reasonably expect the angler to respond at once to its appeal. It effects a considerable economy of time, and, incidentally, of time's equivalent, the end of all our striving—money. It enables the angler to change his fly with the utmost expedition ; in fifteen seconds, according to Mr. Cholmondeley-Pennell's calculations. The estimate does not err on the side of generosity. It may, in specially selected circumstances, be possible to accomplish the change within the period stated, but under many of the conditions to which the practice of the angler's art exposes him, he will certainly require an extension of time.

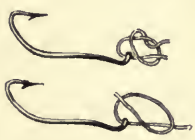
Even Mr. Cholmondeley-Pennell himself must occasionally exceed his limit. The angler on board a boat tossing wildly on a tumultuous sea sometimes measures in minutes the time consumed in threading the gut through the eye of a tiny hook. The task is not easy. Planted firmly in his seat, he grips the fly between the thumb and the index finger of his left hand, and, taking the gut in his right, prepares to execute the delicate manœuvre. The process seems simple enough, and he is just congratulating himself on the immediate success

of his efforts, when the boat, apparently of malice aforethought, gives an unexpected lurch, and his aim is missed. He tries again, with a similar result; he probably tries a dozen times before his purpose seems about to be achieved. But it is not only between the cup and the lip that slips are frequent; the gut has, indeed, entered the eye of the hook, but, while its passage is still incomplete, the boat again swings on the wave, and his labour is undone. The delay is irritating to the most patient of men; a man possessed by the temper of Andrew Lang is "goaded to madness" before his object is attained. But, whatever the time occupied in changing the eyed-fly, it is invariably less than that we waste when dealing with the generally-accepted lure.

The celerity with which it permits the angler to effect a change of fly is not the sole advantage of the eyed-hook. The weakening of the gut at its junction with the fly is a frequent source of trouble and annoyance to the fisherman, but with the eyed-fly, accident is easily foreseen and obviated; if there is any reason to suspect the soundness of the gut to which it is attached, it can be removed instantly and at trifling cost. When the gut on which it is dressed has parted, there is a period to the usefulness of the ordinary fly; the eyed-

fly can be transferred again and again from one piece of gut to another. The gut on which our smaller flies are dressed is, as a rule, unnecessarily heavy; in the case of the eyed-fly, the angler may employ gut of any weight he pleases.

It seems that to the "jam" knot, with which I have been in the habit of attaching the fly to the cast, and in which I have hitherto reposed implicit confidence, there are such grave objections that Mr. Cholmondeley-Pennell no longer recommends its use. It was devised by him, but, since experience has revealed its many imperfections, he has successfully applied his mind to the invention of a better, which he calls the "half-hitch" knot,



and the formation of which is illustrated in the lower of the two figures in the accompanying diagram. The upper figure represents the knot he has discarded. It has failed to justify his faith in it. He has found that it is insecure, and that the point of the cast, projecting at right angles from the head of the fly, catches on the weeds and produces a disturbance in the water. The gravity of the first of these defects will be realized by every angler; the last concerns the dry-fly fisherman alone. The knot has never disappointed me; though I have employed it for years, I have never

known it slip, and if it has displayed the other faults ascribed to it, they have escaped my notice.

I confess to a preference for Mr. Cholmondeley-Pennell's hook. The upward bend close to its extremity brings the shank in line with the cast, and lifts the eye out of the way of the point of the hook—a feature of the device which, though of little moment in the case of large, is said to be vitally important in the case of small hooks.

To the upturned eye I find it impossible to reconcile myself. Its appearance displeases me; though, like the gentleman who so cordially disliked the harmless Dr. Fell, I am unable to say why. My reason is the usual woman's reason, "just because." And it seems to me a mechanical mistake. If the fly is to assume in the water the position we desire, there should be no weight of metal above the shank of the hook. I am, however, prepared to admit that the objection is altogether frivolous. It may be taken for granted that the upturned eye is innocent of evil; what influence it might be supposed to exercise on the attitude of the lure is fully counterbalanced by the dressing. It would be less popular with the dry-fly angler did it prevent his fly from sitting upright on the water.

The angler who employs the eyed-fly, and who de-

sires to be thoroughly equipped, should provide himself with Mr. Cholmondeley-Pennell's Tweezers. He will find them extremely useful for the purpose they have been devised to serve. I have, however, had no experience of their merits. I have never owned them. The simpler my equipment, the happier I am. Since the implements I do possess have an irritating trick of disappearing just when their presence is most urgently required, to add to their number would be to fill to overflowing the cup of my sorrows, already full enough.

Is it possible to explain the different methods adopted by the trout in rising to the natural fly? They are not based on chance or whim; they own a definite cause outside the volition of the trout, and affecting, not an occasional, isolated fish, but a whole body of fish simultaneously and equally. The circumstances which determine the character of the rise are probably unvarying in their action. The same conditions will invariably produce the same variety of rise.

Occasionally the fish take the fly with a loud splash, not throwing themselves entirely from the water, but freely exposing their caudal extremities as they turn to go down again. Their behaviour resembles that of saithe when feeding on herring sile near the surface of the water. They are quick and hurried in their move-

AN UNPROMISING DAY—LOCH LEVEN.

ments, and dash excitedly here and there as if eager to utilize to the full, a passing opportunity of indulging in the rare delight of a satisfying meal.

I have never seen the rise I refer to better exemplified than on the occasion of a recent visit to a little West Coast loch. The hour was early morning of a day in June. The wind was easterly, high and very cold, and accompanied by frequent, heavy showers of rain. The surface of the water seethed with feeding fish. To what they were rising I could not see, but since their reception of the artificial fly was as hearty as that they bestowed upon the natural, it was obvious that they were not exclusively particular in their choice of food. But their manner of taking the former differed entirely from that in which they were rising to the latter, and the difference was probably due to a difference in the conditions under which the two objects were presented to them. I have seen the same variety of rise in quite other circumstances—during the forenoon and in brilliant sunshine. The only features common to both occasions were a breeze of wind, and, in consequence, a rough and broken water. When the trout are noisily splashing on the surface, are they occupied with flies buffeted about by the tumbling waves, and is their lively excitement caused, not only by the

number, but by the quick movements of the objects of their pursuit?

In a calm, the trout appear to rise in quite another fashion. They break the water with a swirl, but display no portion of their bodies above the surface. It has been suggested that they are then feeding on submerged flies, but, since the swirling rise occurs when the fish are visibly taking insects on the surface, the suggestion does not afford a satisfactory explanation of the facts.

When the trout, on rising, occasion but the merest dimpling of the water, it is probable that they are lying just beneath the surface, and, having quietly secured a fly, as quietly permit themselves to sink. They do not turn about in their descent.

Now and then the trout, in rising to the lure, leaps quite out of the water. The generally accepted explanation of his action is unconvincing. His intention, it is said, is to submerge and drown the fly. How does the observer know? Why, the uninstructed are disposed

to ask, should he do anything so obviously superfluous? Since he finds the angler's artifice beneath the surface, it should be patent, even to a fish, that his purpose being already accomplished he may conserve his energies for future use. As there seems nothing to prevent him from taking the fly at once, why should he delay and, while needlessly endeavouring to drown it, give it an opportunity of making its escape? I am unable, like some anglers, to penetrate the obscurity of his piscine mind, but I fancy that he shuns dispensable exertion with a good-will equal to our own. We are usually inclined to magnify the trout's intelligence, but in this particular instance we credit him with the possession of a very feeble wit.

Two varieties of the rise are described by a recent writer. In one, the trout rises with the object of taking the fly from below, but the velocity of his approach carries him beyond his goal and he involuntarily leaves the water; in the other, he deliberately springs into the air with the intention of seizing the fly in his descent. The author referred to pretends to be able to distinguish between the two. The trout which is borne above the water by the impetus of his approach, drops back at once; the other, with the object of steadying his aim, checks for a moment his aerial flight. Even

those who accept without question the most marvellous tales of the trout's sagacity may hesitate to believe him physically capable of maintaining, if but for the fraction of a second, his position in the air. Surely there is no occasion to seek a motive for his conduct. It is entirely purposeless; it is, I think, in every case the necessary result of the speed at which he nears the surface. The angler rarely secures a trout which, in rising to the fly, leaps from the water. When he does, it is generally hooked foul; should the hook be found in its mouth, it is more than likely that it was taken on the rise. The trout, to be sure, does at times forsake his native element with the object of capturing a fly, but only when the brief excursion is essential to the attainment of his aim. I have more than once seen a trout spring at an insect flitting over the water, and I have killed many on the upper bob-fly as it dangled in the air an inch or two above the surface.

Our opportunities of observing the manner in which the trout approaches the fly are comparatively infrequent. Mr. Hamish Stuart, who records many interesting observations on the habits of that fish, describes two incidents which came under his notice and serve to elucidate the subject. My experience has been trifling compared with his, but I have been, on several occa-

sions, enabled to observe the trout's behaviour towards the lure. Once, in water deep but crystal-clear, I had the pleasure of watching a fish which, as unfortunately it happened, was not to be mine. His conduct was quite unlike that of either of the trout observed by Mr. Stuart. He came at the fly swiftly—if without a rush—and, having failed to secure it, turned and disappeared as swiftly in the direction of the great stone from beneath which he had emerged. Having missed the object of his desire, he seemed to lose all interest in it. He did not range about in the hope of retrieving his failure ; he withdrew at once, and remained withdrawn. The fly was over him again while he was still in sight, but he refused to bestir himself a second time.

The approach of the fish was not always distinguished by haste. On another occasion, fishing in brown but translucent water, I saw the vague, shadowy form of a trout float slowly from the depths and as slowly near my fly. While he was yet some distance from the surface he paused, and, changing his direction, circled leisurely around beneath the lure. He did not detect my presence, and there was no suggestion of suspicion in his bearing. His hesitation seemed rather the result of languid interest. Possibly he had, like the Athenians, a weakness for novelties, and it may have

been curiosity alone that had drawn him from his lair. If so, it was quickly gratified. A short scrutiny sufficed him, and, mysteriously as he had entered it, he faded out of sight. He was incorporeal as a vision, and his reabsorption into the water from which he appeared to have materialized was complete; not even a grin remained to mark his place.

The trout is proverbially quick of sight, and he detects the presence of the fly from a great distance, even when the fly and he are on or near the surface. Fishing some time ago, I was aware of a trout busily engaged in the shallow water by the margin of the stream. With what he was occupied I could not see, but his movements gave me the impression that he was picking minute objects from off the bank. Almost the whole length of his back was visible above the surface. I cast towards him, though, as he was much beyond reach, without the faintest hope of attracting his attention. My fly fell behind, and quite six feet short of him, yet he saw it at once, and, rushing on it with extraordinary velocity, was hooked before I had time to recover from my surprise.

The time of the rise is uncertain. Cold, especially early in the season, tends to delay it. Rarely it does not occur at all, and throughout the day the water may

remain unbroken by the movements of a fish. As a rule, however, it may be looked for at some period of the forenoon, though the angler need not abandon hope should mid-day find him with an empty creel; the afternoon will sometimes yield him ample compensation for the poverty of the earlier hours of the day. Nor, however encouraging, is a rise an indispensable condition of his success. On the majority of waters, it is true, his skill is exercised in vain unless the fish are visibly indulging a desire for food; but where the means of life are sparingly supplied, his flies will be readily accepted, present them when he may. I have, from ten o'clock in the morning until five in the afternoon, enjoyed uninterrupted sport although during the entire time not half a dozen trout were seen to rise.

It is not the hour of the rise alone that the angler finds incalculable; its extent and duration are equally beyond conjecture. Occasionally it is sparse and soon over, while at other times our ears are, for hours together, gladdened by the plashing murmur of surface-feeding fish. The rise begins and ends abruptly; it is not heralded by single spies, and no loiterers remain when it is past. On a loch of some extent and varying depth it is often local; all portions of the water are not

simultaneously affected. While one angler is in constant occupation, another in a neighbouring bay is tearfully bemoaning his unhappy lot.

From the beginning of June until the end of the season the angler may anticipate an evening rise, especially under the conditions I have already endeavoured to describe. On some waters the evening rise occurs the season through. Occasionally, indeed, the sport to be obtained by day is insignificant ; where fish are large and few, the angler will generally find, even as early as April, the hour succeeding sunset the only one of the twenty-four in which his pastime is pursued with profit. Not until gloaming do the great, full-nourished trout show themselves disposed to approach the surface. So uncertain, however, is the humour of the trout, that even the evening rise may disappoint us.

The phenomenon we know as rising short remains a puzzle to the angler. On it, as on so many other problems of our art, we are still divided. It manifests itself in such a variety of circumstances that it is impossible to ascribe it to a single cause. I have, like others, suffered from it frequently, but have never known it more painfully displayed than on the occasion of a recent visit to a water holding trout so numerous that it seldom fails the angler. It was early

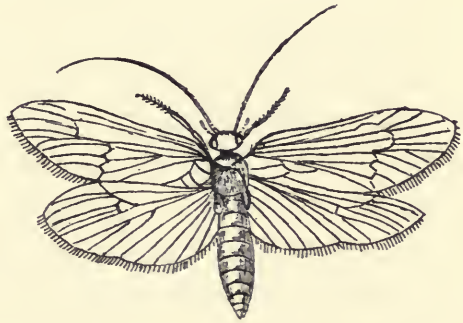
in June, and the water, stirred by a breeze of wind from the west, shimmered in the light of a burning sun. The trout were leaping over all the loch, and rose to the artificial fly as eagerly as to the natural. They rose to every cast, but were rarely touched. The consistency with which they turned away from the lure just as they seemed about to grasp it became exasperating, and its effect on a temper at all times impatient, was fatal. It encouraged hasty and inartful casting and induced a tendency to strike wildly in the hope of securing the fish whether they would or not. Though the day was large in promise, the results were meagre; I hooked but one in seven or eight of the fish that rose to me. It may have been that the bright light revealed the artifice to the trout as they approached the surface, but the day was no brighter than the day before had been, and on it they had shown no irritating shyness of the fly. Short rising, besides, is not confined to days of brilliant sunshine; it is, at times, as trying to the angler's patience when the sky is over-cast and the light is dull and grey. It is not unknown even in the dusk. According to Mr. Smurthwaite, it is due to the employment of a fly not merely of the wrong colour, but of the wrong tone. Between the lure and the insect it simulates there exists

a difference patent to the eye of the trout if to man's inferior organ imperceptible as that between two Chinamen. When the trout are rising short they refuse every fly the angler offers them. On the occasion referred to, I changed my flies repeatedly without the least effect; but it may be, though I doubt it, that, varied as these were, there were among them none which did not prove offensive to the nice discrimination of the fish. Even a change to the very smallest flies in my possession failed to induce a change in the situation.

The angler sometimes fancies that he can trace the short rise to the superior education of the trout. It is certain that on water rarely fished the artificial fly arouses no suspicion; I have, on a loch on which the angle was cast for the first time, killed ninety per cent. of the fish that rose to me. On the other hand, however, I have been equally successful on water, every trout in which must have had experience of the dangers lurking in the feathered lure.

We are inclined to blame ourselves when we fail

to hook the fish that rise to us. Occasionally, when fishing with too long a line, we may miss a trout we should certainly secure were we able to strike with greater celerity, but as a rule we have no cause for self-reproach. It is not only the artificial fly that is missed by the trout. I have watched them rising to the natural fly, and have been surprised at the frequency with which they failed in their aim, even when that aim was an object so large as the Phryganea grandis. Time and again I have seen that insect still occupying its position on the surface of the water after the subsidence of the commotion caused by a rising fish, and it will scarcely be maintained that it was indebted for its salvation to the fortunate possession of a displeasing tone of colour. There seems to be a great difference of opinion as to the frequency with which the natural fly is missed. Mr. Smurthwaite affirms that not once in a thousand times does the purpose of the trout miscarry; Mr. Hodgson declares that it seldom does anything else.



While neither is strictly accurate, the truth inclines, I think, to Mr. Hodgson's side.

When the wet-fly fisher has seen the rise, the trout has either secured the fly or missed it. He should, therefore, strike at once, and in the direction in which his rod is moving The trout detects the unreality of the lure as soon as it is within his lips, and if the angler delay until the pull is felt, he may delay too long. While the line is slack he cannot tell with certainty whether the fly has been seized or not, and the sooner he ascertains the fact the better. Strike with what celerity he may, however, many of the fish he raises will escape him unless he be as phenomenally skilful as the Irish correspondent of *The Fishing Gazette*, who kills every fish he sees rising and many of those he only rises (*sic*) to himself. What amazing sport would have been mine had I brought to basket all the trout I have seen break the surface of the water during a long day's fishing on some well-stocked Highland loch! The angler need not strike violently, though he may, perhaps, employ a little more force with small fish than with large; a heavy fish will hook himself by his own weight. Whether he strike from the elbow or from the wrist seems a matter of little moment, but, if his line be of convenient length, the action of the latter

joint will be found quite powerful enough to serve his purpose. It has been said that the movement described in striking should be that made in turning the key in a lock. The method is worse than useless. Since the effect of simply turning the hand as in the action mentioned is to depress the point of the rod, it thwarts rather than assists the angler in the execution of his design.

Whether the angler strikes from the reel or not is a detail determined by circumstances. If his line run very smoothly, or he be the enviable possessor of a calm and even temperament, he may safely keep a finger on the line. Should he, however, lack self-control, and in moments of excitement tend to lose his head, he will be wise to leave the line alone and employ a reel so stiff that it provides him with the necessary check.

The act of striking is instinctive. The natural impulse of the beginner is to throw up the point of his rod at sight of a rise, and the action is always much too energetic; he strikes from the shoulder, and the result is generally a catastrophe. If the fish is small, it is sent hurtling through the air to fall somewhere in the dim distance far beyond his ken; if it is large, he smashes the top-joint of his rod, or the cast snaps and

the trout escapes, trailing a yard or two of gut behind it. When knowledge comes, however, wisdom does not linger. With years and experience he acquires command of his emotions and learns, in the school of adversity, that the straightening of the line is sufficient to fix the hook in all save the very smallest of fish. So automatic becomes the lifting of the rod that the angler is wholly unconscious of the act; sometimes, indeed, asserts and sincerely believes that he does not strike at all. Once, discussing the subject with my gillie, I expressed the opinion that striking was quite unnecessary, and gravely assured him that I never struck. His sole response was a bland smile, in which I was obliged to join, if a trifle less blandly, when, just at the moment, a fish was missed and my flies were jerked suddenly into the boat beside me.

As we know, the trout are unequally distributed throughout the stream. They exhibit a decided preference for certain situations, and within these each occupies a position of his own which he has acquired and which he holds on the Carlylean principle that might is right.

> "The good old rule
> Sufficeth them, the simple plan,
> That they should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can."

No altruistic sentiment affects their intercourse; their philosophy is a frank Egoism. Self-interest, naked and unashamed, is the law of the water. In the struggle for place each, like Hal o' the Wynd, fights for his own hand, and he yields to nothing save superior force. The most powerful among them seizes the position which gives him easiest access to the means of life, and he defends it jealously against intrusion. He tolerates no interference with his privileges. Of the food borne on the stream he seizes all he can, and leaves to others only what he fails to intercept; if anything escapes him it is because there is a limit to his capacity for action, and, possibly, also to his appetite. Behind him the smaller fish are ranged in order of size, all as impatient as he of encroachment on the rights they have usurped. Each is waiting a chance of promotion, and when a vacancy occurs it is filled at once by the next in succession. No delicate scruples deter them from the empty seat; before it has had time to cool it is in the possession of a new tenant. Should the angler kill a fish to-day, he will to-morrow find its place in the possession of another.

The loch yields fewer opportunities than the river for the study of the habits of the trout. The fish are not within sight, and what knowledge of the subject we

possess is based on inference rather than on observation. Not all the causes which determine the trout's position in the flowing water are in operation on the loch, but there is reason to believe that in the latter, as surely as in the former, he holds a fixed and definite place—until, driven by the most compelling instinct of his nature, he leaves it for the stream. How far he wanders from it in search of food we do not know, but it is, I think, certain that he returns to it when his hunger has been appeased, and remains in it continuously while at rest. To every loch-fisher it must have occurred to raise and miss a fish, and take him later in the very same spot. It is, of course, possible to contend, and the contention is difficult to meet, that the fish caught on the second visit to the water is not that originally seen. It is so easy to make a mistake; fish of a size are hard to distinguish, and although the angler may be perfectly satisfied that the trout he has just consigned to his creel is the very trout he failed to hook when last he fished the loch, he will rarely be in a position to produce convincing evidence that he is right. I have, myself, taken from beneath a stone, two trout so exactly alike that, had I not had both in actual possession, I should have been absolutely sure they were the same. On the other hand, I have killed a trout in

circumstances which preclude all possibility of error. I rose him on five different occasions with an interval of several days between. On each occasion the sun was shining brightly, and in the colourless, pellucid water I had an opportunity of seeing him distinctly as he approached the fly. He invariably rose in precisely the same place. So kenspeckle was he and so convincing the circumstances in which we foregathered, that it seemed impossible to be mistaken in his identity; certainly nothing will persuade me that the shapely three-pound trout that succumbed to the seductions of a small March Brown—in August—was not the same trout that, a month before, had taken and succeeded in ejecting a little Red and Teal.

Whether the trout in the loch all lie with their heads in the same direction, is a problem which, although it seems of small importance, has long concerned the angler. It should not be difficult to solve; examination of trout in an aquarium should settle it at once. But even that appears to involve an unnecessary expenditure of energy, for we may safely infer that in the absence of a stream the trout dispose themselves in any attitude they please.

In casting, the angler's object is to place his flies lightly on the water at the very spot desired, and the

method by which he seeks to accomplish it is determined by the direction of the wind and by the presence or absence of obstacles to the free play of his line. When the wind is behind him and there is, in his vicinity, nothing to interfere with his liberty of action, he employs the "over-handed" cast. The opposition of a head wind he overcomes by the use of the "downward cut." When there is a high bank or similar obstruction behind him or close at his side, or he has the misfortune to be placed between two other anglers on board a boat, he is forced to resort to the "steeple" cast. Should he desire to present his flies to a fish feeding under overhanging boughs, he has recourse to the "under-handed" cast.

From the task of describing the various methods in which the fly is thrown I willingly abstain; it is beset with difficulties much too formidable for an unskilled pen like mine. But I have another and a better reason for abstention; a reason candour compels me to disclose. On the part of one who only by accident succeeds in placing his lure within a foot of the spot towards which it is his purpose to direct it, it would be the merest impertinence to offer to others instruction in the art of casting. Happily that art is one in which written directions, even when lucidly conveyed, are

comparatively valueless. The young angler knows what he desires to do, and the difficulty of learning how to do it he should not, even without tuition, find insuperable. His native intelligence will soon enable him to correct the errors certain to accompany his initial efforts to cast a skilful line, and earnest application will in time make him an adept.

Only on the water will he find the conditions necessary to the perfection of his art, but he may usefully begin his education on the lawn. But the field—and the moment—of his operations must be chosen with the greatest circumspection. Of the spectacle of a grown man gravely brandishing his wand above a waterless expanse of turf there is, to the uninformed, but one interpretation, and, unless he would risk his reputation for the possession of a sound mind, he should shun the observation of his neighbours. Should he, after practising, detect a subtle change in the demeanour of his friends; if, instead of greeting him with their accustomed frankness, they hold themselves aloof, and regarding him askance, whisper mysteriously together, he may feel sure that his seclusion was incomplete and that his sanity has become the theme of general discussion. The writer is not facetious; it *has* happened to one earnest, if incautious, follower of

Walton to be currently reported "touched," because he had been seen apparently endeavouring to raise imagined trout among the daisies on his washing-green.

Should the novice lack self-confidence, he may procure the assistance of a friend on whose ability to teach him he feels he can depend; or if, with small capacity for learning, he owns a superfluity of wealth, he may undergo a course of professional instruction. He need not put his trust in books; they are unreliable as princes. The information he will find in them is confusingly diverse, and often hard of comprehension. What, for example, will he make of the advice to turn his face up or down the river when it lists the wind to blow in that direction? With much of that information, too, we might readily dispense. For instruction in the processes necessarily involved in casting, the beginner may have reason to be grateful, but elaborate directions concerning the grasp of the rod and other details not essential to success are of no very obvious utility. It may profit the learner to be told that in essaying a cast he must be careful to lift his line well into the air, and that in its backward swing his rod must not be carried much beyond the vertical, but in an erudite discourse on style he will discover little that is worth the knowing. In the casting of the fly, style is as varied as in the

wielding of the golf club, and it is doubtful if in a company of half a dozen expert anglers there will be found two by whom the rod is handled in precisely similar fashion. All achieve their purpose, though in achieving it each displays a manner in some respects peculiarly his own.

In the maze of conflicting theories the youthful angler is in danger of becoming hopelessly perplexed. We are taught by one instructor that casting involves the employment of considerable force, while a second begs us to remember that pressing is as fatal to the success of the angler as to the success of that zealous tiller of the soil—the golfer. Now we are informed that in its downward swing the rod should be checked when it makes with the horizontal an angle of forty-five degrees, and again, that it should not be brought to rest until it is parallel with the surface of the water. One angler, in the process of throwing the line, gradually reduces the speed at which his rod is moving; another stops his rod entirely in its downward course, and, after a momentary pause, drops it to a horizontal position.

We are advised that, just as the line is about to complete its forward swing, a check should be given to its farther progress. If allowed to swing out to its full extent it falls on the water with alarming splash. That the unfortunate contingency may be averted, the angler is instructed to grasp his rod more firmly, or draw it slightly towards him, or, with his free hand, pull in a short length of line. The most skilful handler of the rod I have ever known did none of these things; on the contrary, he, when his rod had reached the lowest point of its descent, gave it a curious little forward thrust, as if with the object of preventing his line from being abruptly checked as the cast approached completion. In my ignorance of mechanics, I am loth to express an opinion on the subject, but it seems to me that if the angler desired to bring about the very accident he fears, he could not do better than follow the advice I have quoted for his information.

Our teachers still entertain the "exploded idee" that the angler will fail to accomplish a successful cast if he begins the forward movement of his rod before the line is streaming to its full extent behind him. The mistake is so easily corrected that, even with the knowledge of the vitality of error, one wonders at its obstinate persistence.

When Cotton advised the angler to fish "fine and far off" he spoke with the knowledge of his time. Could he forsake the shades and return to cast his angle on the river he loved above all the rest, he would probably find cause to reconsider his advice. It is inapplicable to the conditions under which we now pursue our sport. It is a relic of the days when down-stream fishing was the common practice and the angler was compelled to fish far off that he might escape the observation of his alert and quick-eyed quarry. Our art has not greatly advanced since Cotton's time—if we have increased the amount of "trumpery" in use—but one of the few things we *have* learned is the unwisdom of fishing far off when it is possible to fish near. The ability to cast a long line the angler finds useful on occasion, but he should reserve its exercise for special circumstances only. It is not for every-day display. The disadvantages of a long line are obvious; it cannot be thrown with accuracy, and it prevents the angler from striking quickly and effectively. But he must be careful to avoid the opposite extreme. Though a short line enables him to strike at once, it is, perhaps, even more difficult to cast than a long one; it follows the rod much too smartly and strikes the water with a violence certain to excite the apprehension of every

fish in his vicinity. The length of line he employs with success is determined by the length of his rod and by the height at which he is placed above the surface of the water. The line he commands with ease when fishing from a high bank passes beyond his control when he descends to the level of the stream.

Whether the angler employs a split-cane or a greenheart rod seems a matter of small importance, and, since the difference between them is chiefly one of price, his choice is probably determined by his purse. The split-cane is the rod of the Plutocracy; its cost places it beyond the reach of the impecunious. But in this instance the cheap is not necessarily the nasty; a good greenheart rod is as serviceable an implement as any angler need desire. I have fished with one for many years, and I cannot imagine that from the prohibitively expensive split-cane I could have derived a greater satisfaction. It was built for me by Mr. William Robertson, of Glasgow, and has never given me occasion for complaint. Its only fault, and one not inherent in the rod itself but in its relation to the arm that wields it, is that it is just a trifle heavy. It is single-handed, but to employ it in comfort and with some degree of skill I am compelled to bring my left hand to the assistance of my right. Towards the end

of a long day I sometimes wish it an ounce or two less in weight, but now that it has grown familiar I would not willingly discard it for another; even for a former favourite, in the use of which my hands, once deft enough, have completely lost their cunning.

I write of my rod as "it," but the employment of the singular number is, perhaps, not wholly justified. It involves an interesting problem for the casuist. Since the rod has been evilly entreated and repeatedly renewed in all its parts—with the exception of the reel-fittings—it becomes a nice question whether it is still that originally constructed by the maker. Have I been in continuous possession of the same rod, or have I within these years owned more than one? As, through all its various mutations, its character has undergone no change, I am disposed to think of it as having had a life of unbroken continuity.

The act of casting demands no great expenditure of energy, but when repeated many times a day it becomes fatiguing. The angler, therefore, should avoid a rod he cannot wield with ease, and in the use of which his endurance may be overtaxed. He may not, in any circumstances, hope to escape entirely the suffering which inevitably follows prolonged or unusual exertion, but he will ache much less acutely if he

employ a rod the management of which is well within his strength. But to obtain lightness he need not sacrifice efficiency. Whatever the weight of the rod, it should be moderately stiff; if supple and pliant it will prove a disappointment. It will be found impossible to cast with it against the wind, and even in a favourable wind, its elasticity will seriously interfere with the success of the angler's efforts to control the direction of his line. It is, however, in playing a fish that its defects are most apparent. It places the angler in an ignominious position; he does not control the trout; it takes charge of him and, for a time, deals with him at its pleasure. While it is occasionally necessary that in its first wild dash for liberty, the trout should have its way, the sooner it is subdued to the will of its captor the better. To continue trifling with it long after it should be within the net is to waste time. The angler never feels more ridiculous than when being played with by a heavy fish on a feeble rod, and the consciousness that he is sustaining a minor part in the amusing comedy, is not conducive to his self-content.

I was induced, lately, to try a rod some two feet shorter and several ounces lighter than my own, but in my unaccustomed hands, it proved a futile weapon.

The angler to whom it belonged, though a tyro, handled it with much dexterity, but to me it was utterly refractory; my utmost efforts, aided by a following wind, failed to extend the line along the water, and time and again the flies fell in a tangled heap just without the boat we occupied. As I had no great desire to overcome the difficulties presented by its novelty, I did not persevere. Though, since its flexibility compelled the angler to treat them tenderly, relatively few fish escaped it, the delay attending their subjection would, when the water seethed around us, have been an ordeal too painfully trying to my patience. I preferred my own more powerful rod which, if, in my haste, it did cost me an occasional trout, enabled me to fill the basket with much greater expedition. To some anglers the mere playing of a trout is not completely satisfying.

When the trout, though rising freely to the natural fly, regard with indifference the counterfeits presented to them by the angler, there may be wisdom in giving them an opportunity of considering others—larger or smaller or of a different variety. In the absence of rising fish, however, the angler will derive no advantage from a change of lure. If that on his cast fails to prove enticing, he has in his possession none likely to

succeed. Until moved by a desire for surface food, the trout is not to be drawn from the depths of the water by any artificial fly no matter how seductive. It does occasionally happen that the substitution of a fresh cast for that the angler has been fruitlessly employing is followed immediately by a stir among the fish, but the relation between the two is not necessarily that of cause and effect; on the contrary, they may be entirely unrelated and their concurrence accidental. The angler's tardy success is not due to the superior fascination of the new fly, but to the fact that he has, by the merest chance, discarded the old at a moment coincident with the beginning of a rise. The trout he takes would have been taken in any case; they became disposed to feed, and would have accepted the ineffective flies just as readily as those to which they have succumbed. Things are seldom what they seem, and the cautious angler does not jump to a conclusion; he is slow to assume that the obvious is certainly the true.

The practice of staining gut might be discontinued without prejudice to the success of the angler. Since the material of which the cast consists is—when good—transparent and colourless, it is probably more generally useful in its natural condition than when coloured

by art. Certainly no one colour will render it a whit more valuable than it is as it comes from the hands of the manufacturer. If, however, the angler will have it disguised he should provide himself with a supply stained in various hues to suit the varied circumstances in which he means to employ it. When, for instance, it is his intention to fish Loch Leven, he should have it dyed a delicate glaucous-green, but when his purpose is to cast a fly on the dark waters of a Highland loch, it should be coloured pale brown or yellow.

There may be reason in staining gut green or brown, since the trout, if he takes note of it at all, may regard it as a piece of stray vegetable matter, but what was in the mind of the angler who first dyed it blue? Did he fancy that he was assimilating its colour to that of the water, or was he under the—in this climate—erroneous impression that the fish see it against an azure sky?

The angler may "work" his flies, or he may draw them slowly towards him with uninterrupted motion, or, when fishing up-stream, he may submit them entirely to the influence of the current. It is widely believed that when the lure is moved through the water in a series of short jerks the alternate opening and closing of the hackle gives it a deceptive appear-

ance of life and imparts to it a greater fascination. There is a reasonableness about the belief that commends it to one's acceptance, but whether in actual practice the working of the fly favourably affects the angler's basket is by no means certain; I have never been able to persuade myself that it increased the weight of mine. Stewart, one of the most successful of wet-fly fishers, advocates the use of a soft hackle in the dressing of the lure, because, he says, "the water agitates the feathers and gives them a more life-like appearance," but, as he also declares that the trout take the artificial for a dead fly or a fly helplessly caught in the stream, and that therefore it is absurd of the angler to attempt by any motion of his hand to impart to his lures the aspect of vitality, his opinions, like the gods, are hard to reconcile.

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